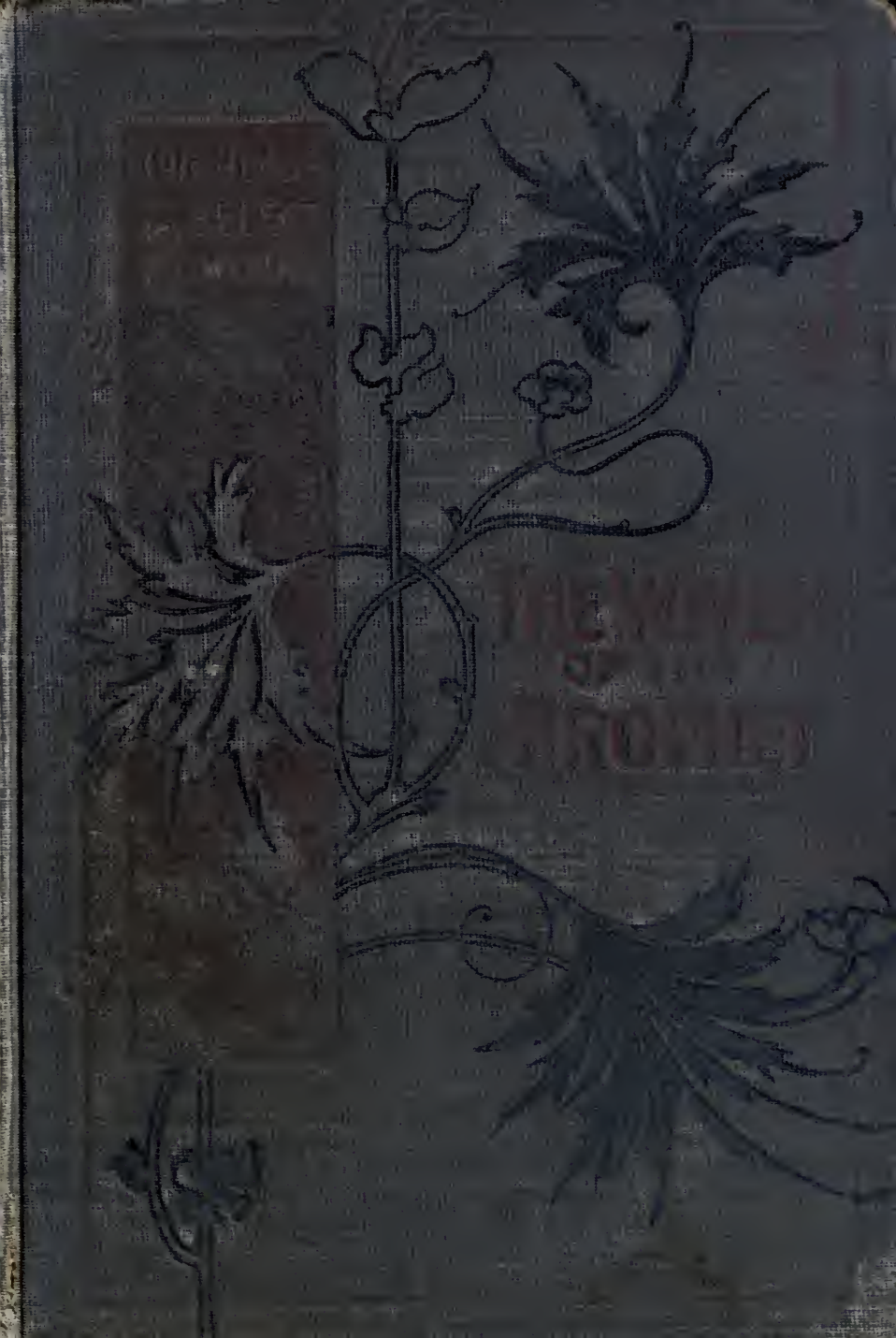

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The Wives of the Prophet

A NOVEL

BY

OPIE READ

Author of "The Carpetbagger," "Old Ebenezer," "The Jucklins," "My Young Master," "On the Suwanee River," "A Tennessee Judge," "Emmett Bonlore," "A Kentucky Colonel," "The Tear in the Cup and Other Stories," "The Colossus," "Len Gansett," etc.

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THE WIVES OF THE PROPHET.

CHAPTER I.

Away up the Cumberland river, in Tennessee, there is a scope of country that romantic tourists, who doubtless never have been abroad, are wont to declare reminds them of Switzerland. It lies, or more correctly speaking, rolls and tumbles to the eastward from the river. The mountains are not high enough to be white at the top nor the valleys deep enough to be dismal at the bottom. In winter a hazel gauze is hung from hill-top to hill-top, and in summer a dazzling, greenish mist creeps up from the river. Very little is known of this section of country. Its principal visitors, backed by the government, care not for scenery, loiter not in a nook because it is romantic, but pry about in foreboding places, looking for whisky that bears not the stamp of legitimacy.

Houses are so scattered and so hidden away that one might fancy them to be suspicious of one another; there appear to be no paths running from one house to another, and a stranger might wander for days at a time without

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coming upon a habitation. But in the very heart of this wave-like, toss-up of country there is a settlement, old and so strange that those who sought to get at the thread of its mystery came away with a piece of tangled yarn. The mystery lay in the reason of its existence. The houses, built of stone, are marked with age, moss-grown; the walls are cracked. Naught save religion could have organized such a brotherhood; naught but the desire to worship, to practice a belief in a world to come, unobserved by this unreverential, jeering world, could have forced men and women to so complete a seclusion. The houses are low, built in a circle and are covered with flat stones. In the center stands a sort of temple, with a high arched entrance and with a porch supported by four massive rock pillars. Like Rome, this village held its real name a profound secret, too holy to be pronounced by mortal lips. It was called Bolga. What the name meant, no one knew, no one could learn. Five years ago, Bolga must have held four hundred inhabitants. But conditions are changed now. The village is in a shallow basin, an area of land embracing a hundred acres; it is nearly square, and a hill, almost a mountain, arises from each corner. A pamphlet printed in North Carolina more than a hundred years ago, and now owned by the Tennessee Historical Society, says that in 1697 a new religious order, numbering forty souls, arrived from England, but refus-

ing to remain in a civilized community, pushed onward into the wilds. They seemed to have held their religion as a divine secret, the pamphlet set forth, and could find no one in the colony who was worthy to receive it. It is now believed by the people of Tennessee, and particularly so by Gov. Bob Taylor, who has given the subject much thought, that this strange religious sect, spoken of in the pamphlet, founded the village of Bolga.

During nearly two centuries the religion of the Bolgaites remained the mysterious secret which its founder intended that it should, and not until recently was anyone prepared by fact or supposition to hang a story from the eaves of the weather-stained, the moss-dampened pile of stone, the rude but solemn temple in the wilds of Tennessee.

The people of Bolga dug their living out of the soil. Their clothes came from the hand-loom. Their linen was the finest and brought the highest price in the market. There was no individual ownership of property. The village was governed by four Councilmen and a Father, who was really the chief executive. This Council, with its Father, not only had charge of temporal affairs, but kept in sacred administration the creed of the community. Males and females held the same rights and at the age of seventeen were taken into the temple and made active members of the church; and here it was that they took an oath which

bound them to the religion of their fathers. It was known that a violation of this oath meant death, but no one ever spoke of the consequences entailed by a violation, for no one believed in so perfidious a possibility. Every three years a strange election took place. The entire village would assemble in the temple, and then after the most careful deliberation, five of the handsomest maidens were elected as Wives of the Prophet. They were decorated with flowers and clothed with the finest linen, and after a whole day of festivity, were installed in a round building, the House of the Prophet, where they lived during the three years of their wife-hood. No one was permitted to address them except in a most reverential manner—even their parents approached them with signs of deepest respect. It was believed that some day, no one dared to presume when, the Prophet would come and claim his wives, and that from the off-spring of the union would arise the true savior of mankind. If a girl were engaged to be married and her wedding day were approaching, she was compelled to wait until the wife-election, to see whether or not she should be selected by the council to serve as a Wife of the Prophet, and if chosen, she was then forced to wait three years before her actual marriage could take place. But to be a wife of the Prophet was so great an honor that to put off a temporal marriage was never regarded as a hardship. Many an old woman, wrinkled,

toothless, spoke with deep feeling of the time when she had been a wife of the Prophet.

The Council and the Father were elected for life. Every three years, just after the wives of the Prophet had been chosen, the Council, headed by the Father, would retire to some secluded place and there in secret rehearse their creed in the presence of the Master of all Life—rebinding themselves and their people to the covenant, solemnly vowing to keep the faith.

The government of Bolga was simple. Crime, drunkenness was unknown. All differences were settled by the Council. Education was fostered, but it was of a peculiar sort. The school was given almost wholly to rhetoric. Mathematics, the Bolgaites said, was the invention of man, but speech was God-given. So, among these people, speech attained a peculiar force, almost an elegance. Brethren who took the linen to market, were permitted to buy any smoothly written book, provided that it had no undertone that might be damaging to their religion. As a result the maidens were romantic and the men spoke in stilted sentences. But they abominated newspapers, declaring that they were rude in expression, that they disturbed the mind with frightful pictures, with records of crime and with political strife. Why should there be political troubles? God had not given politics to man. He had handed down a true religion and politics had

sought to crush it. This would argue that the Bolgaites were the people forming the new sect spoken of by the old pamphlet, and that having struggled in vain for their rights in England, had, after long persecution, come to this country, determined to guard their secret, not to experiment with salvation, but to grow children in the faith rather than to proselyte.

Strangers sometimes came to Bolga, but they were treated with cool indifference. If they were hungry they were given food and told to go their way. If they asked to remain over night they were informed that the village was full. "What is that round house for?" strangers were wont to ask; and the answer was, "To serve its own purpose." "And that heavy building over there is a church, isn't it?" "That also serves its purpose," some one invariably would answer.

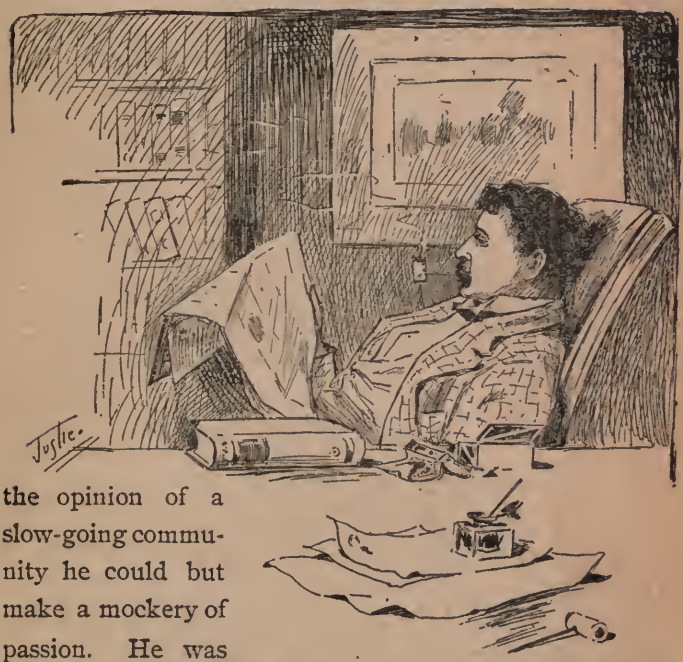
A summer day was closing. The Wives of the Prophet had been chosen, and had been escorted to the Prophet's house, there to live in honor during three years. Flowers were strewn about the temple, and a pathway of roses led to the Prophet's house. Five old men left the temple and, walking one behind another, solemnly strode toward a secluded vale. They were going to rehearse their creed.

CHAPTER II.

In Nashville lived a young lawyer named Howard Bryce. When he was graduated from Vanderbilt University it was said by that shrewd flatterer — public opinion — that he would reach high up amid the affairs of men and leave his mark there. Nature had been his friend. Circumstances had taken his hand and had made a motion as if to kiss it. Women tapped him with their fans, and called his attention to trivialities in which they were prettily interested. His laugh was infectious and his commonplace talk passed for wit, and his wit passed for genius. He pretended to hold himself in smart contempt; he would say a bright thing and frown at it; he said that to be clever was a clown's province. He knew that the shrewdest way to hide vanity was to exhibit it, to call attention to it, to make fun of it. It was but a question of time, of course, when he would take his place at the head of the bar. But time slipped by and the plodders were passing him. It was his fault; he had not exerted himself. He had read romances while the plodders were reading law. After a while he would read law,

nothing but law. Where would the plodders be then? But idleness had grown upon him and he hated facts. Local opinion ceased to flatter him; no one cared to hear his bright sayings; his epigrams counted against him; he heard a dull man say that they were like a monkey's trick, amusing for a moment. He found that it was a mistake to throw bright darts at a jury, that dullness was always regarded as the law. He was disgusted. He spoke of his trouble, but he did it in so original a way that his friends laughed at him. Unfortunate is the man whose sorrows are amusing. In the sturdy and stubborn affairs of life there is no hope for the man who believes that newness of expression is an essentia grace. If his originality is striking men will call him a crank; if it is not striking they will say that he is shallow. But intellectual surprises, if possessed by this man to the degree of a defect, were not his only blemishes. He lacked moral force, and that was doubtless the reason why his disappointments were amusing to his friends. He made no acknowledgment that might lead one to believe him spiritually awry, but every one seemed to feel that he had no respect for certain laws that should govern the social conduct of man. Indeed, he sometimes made pretenses of a moral sort; but behind one's own words is a flimsy place to hide; they are a lattice-work and men see through them. Bryce was as passionate as an Eliza-

bethan poet. He saw the filth in old plays, and found but little of their strength and beauty. He amused himself with trying to write an erotic book, and threw it away because he felt that he was hampered, that bound by



the opinion of a slow-going community he could but make a mockery of passion. He was possessed of a strong physical attractiveness, an outward grace which sometimes bespeaks an inward wantonness. His hair was black and fine, and his dark eyes were persuasive.

One afternoon Bryce was sitting in his office, leaning on a green-covered table, lazily, dreamily, looking at the shelves containing his law books. His pipe had gone out, had been thrown aside, and ashes were strewn over the table. A friend entered.

"Howard, I see you are hard at work."

"That you, Hartley?" the lawyer asked without looking up. "Sit down."

The visitor sat down; the lawyer yawned. "Anything going on, Howard?"

"Yes; time."

A silence followed. "Howard did you hear about Bentley?"

"No; what about him?"

"Has won his case in the supreme court."

"That so? I thought he would amount to something. He's got just sense enough to apply what little mind nature gave him. Look here!" he added, sitting up, facing about and looking at his visitor, "haven't you fellows anything to do but to come around here to tell me of the success of some plodding yap that I don't care a snap for? I'm getting sick of it, Hartley; in fact I am sick of everything. Now, look here: People were gracious enough to predict a future for me. Why? Because I must have given them some cause. Who inspired the cause? Call it what you will — hanged if I know what

I'm trying to say. But I'm sick of the whole business. Nature said: 'Here you are a bee, without the bee's industry. Now, I'm going to put a dab of honey in front of you, but if you taste it I will clip your wings.'"

"Howard, you must have run against a love disappointment."

The lawyer laughed lazily. "Hartley, you are old enough to know that there isn't any such thing as love, that is, aside from passion. When passion is dead, love is dead. Generosity, certain attributes of the mind, inspire friendship; but what inspires love? Beauty, voluptuousness. But you must pardon me. I forgot that you had been ordained to preach."

"You owe me no apology, Howard; I am more sorrowful than resentful. I always liked you; you were such a help to me years ago. Your hearty buoyancy floated me over troublous waters —"

"Are you going to preach now, Hartley?"

"I wish I might. I wish that I could say something to jolt you."

"Think I need exercise, eh? Why not turn physician and prescribe horseback riding? Pardon the roughness of the way I put it, but you moral-drawing fellows make me tired. You take it into your head that you are going to reform society, and immediately you make a dead set at your friends. Don't worry about me. I have made

up my mind that I'm never to amount to anything, and that's all there is to it. You may think that you can feel about and find the nerve of my ambition, touch it and make me flinch, but you can't. That nerve is dead."

"Howard, if you are in trouble, remember that trouble is the school wherein success is taught. Trouble paints strong pictures on the mind."

"Ah, but the paint eats the canvas. Trouble uses no soft oil in its art. But there, old fellow, don't worry about me." He got up and with winning affection put his hand on his friend's shoulder. "Go to your congregation, tell the women, the pretty ones, always to remain pure; tell the old men not to rent any more houses to the agents of sin. And if nature has disturbed your dreams and your waking hours with the dark eyes and exquisite forms of temptation, pray that they may be removed. One of these days when I am toothless, half-blind, and with this July blood of mine cooled into a slow, January flow, I may come around and astonish you with the statement that I am ready to become virtuous. Gods! old boy, if I were a woman, with the same temperament I now have, that scarlet creature of Babylon would be a lily in comparison with me. Frank with you? Yes."

"Howard, I will pray for you."

"Don't. Carry bread to the poor."

"In deepest faith I will ask God to remove your curse."

"Don't. Clothe the naked. What time is it getting to be? I let my watch run down. I am going out of town for a few days — I am going hunting in the mountains. It's not exactly the right time of year, but I'm going. I want to get away from here. Really, now, Hartley, I am willing to listen to anything that you may have to say, and when I come back I will call on you, and give you a whole evening if you are that much interested in me. I'm not quite so bad a fellow as I make myself appear; there may be a spark of reformation in me somewhere, and when I come back I will let you look for it to blow an honest breath upon it."

CHAPTER III

That afternoon Bryce set out for the mountains. If he thought at all of what his friend had said, it was in the most fleeting, the idlest sort of way. He cared not what any one said, and he was beginning not to care for what any one thought. But to himself he attempted to weave no gauzy fabric of defence. He realized that with an effort made against himself, that with the subjection of self, he might fulfill the promises which his small achievements in earlier life had made. But the making of that one effort, the forcing of a resolution against so intangible an evil, was the one exertion which he could not or would not summon the nerve to make. In one respect he reminded himself of an opium eater — years of planning, but not one hour of execution. He had been strongly ambitious, and his ambition had drawn a map of the roads it was to traverse, but by by-paths, promising enchantment, while agreeing not to lead him far from the high-road, allured him away, and when he looked back he saw that the distance was great and that brambles had sprung up behind him.

He took passage on a small boat that ran far up the river. The weather was delightful, and the air, coming softly down the stream, was like the breath of a purer, sweeter life. He stood at the bow, leaning against the jack-staff. The deck hands were singing a song — the rich, untaught melody of labor's resting time. And he saw that that they, the creatures of rude strength, gazed at him and admired him for the physical quality which they themselves possessed. He turned from them, but still leaning against the jack-staff, gazed at the green hills along the shores of the winding stream. In that peaceful view lay a sobering meditation, and he took it up. He thought of Hartley, of what a modest, self-sacrificing fellow he had ever been, studious, not bright but doggedly plodding toward success; and that success was to be measured by the good which he might do unto man. He thought of the look Hartley had given him at the moment when the scarlet woman of Babylon was mentioned, and a sadness touched him. But was it that recollection that deepened his feeling? Was it not the more melancholy turn of the song which the deck hands were singing?

He went as far as he could by boat, and then on foot strode into the wilds. The boat was to return to Campbell's wood-yard, the place where the river journey ended, within a week, and by that time Bryce was to be

at the landing. It was more than likely that he should be there waiting for the steamer. He had begun to foresee that he was to get but a meager pleasure out of his self-imposed banishment. And, besides, his determination to listen to Hartley drew him toward home. He would go to his church, steal in, and after services surprise him with his presence. Who knew but that Hartley might in some way have been inspired to save men from ruin. But, then, up arose the stumbling-block: Who was inspired to place temptations in the way of man? Why should he be tempted? Who was to be responsible for the evils growing out of that temptation? But what good could come from such reasoning? He would go to hear Hartley. Yes; and he would make an effort to reclaim himself. After all he had not wandered away so very far. He was still young, twenty-eight, and was not a drunkard. Why life had just begun to spread itself out in front of him. Why had people commented upon his failure when in truth he had not begun to try?

One night he missed finding a house, and he lay in the woods. His bed was a dreary hollow between two frowning cliffs, and along toward morning, when at last he had forced himself to sleep, he was startled back to consciousness by the scream of a panther. This was sport, no doubt, but he did not like it. He caught up his gun, and stood gazing about him. He heard the panther again,

screaming down the gulch, and he fired in the direction of the sound. And the report of his gun had not rumbled off into silence when up the ravine there was a whip-like crack and a bullet buzzed past him.

"Hi, up there!" he cried. "Look out; you'll hit me."

Then there came another crack and another bullet.

"Look out, you infernal fool! The panther's gone."

"Don't want the panter," a voice cried.

"What do you want?"

"Want you, and if you move I'll git you, too."

"Want me?"

"Yas. Don't move."

Some one was approaching. What could all this mean? "You stop there!" Bryce shouted, "or I'll shoot you. I don't know who you are, or what you want, but you stop there."

The footsteps ceased. A silence followed, and then a voice, coming as if from behind something, shouted: "Head him off down thar, Tuck! Ef he comes up this way I've got him."

Bryce stepped back until he found the shelter of a rock. "Will you be so accommodating as to explain why you want me?" he shouted.

"Mebby you'll know when we git you, an' mebby you won't."

"But what have I done?"

"You'll find out between now an' daylight. The folks have been watchin' you, an' put us on yo' track. Come up here to spy round for the gover'mint, did you? Wa'al, we'll l'arn you. Tuck off Bob Edd Sevier last fall, an' hain't fotch him back yit. We know you. You're the very man. Keep a sharp lookout down thar', Tuck, an' we'll hold him here till the other fellers come. Oh, you're putty brash to come back here so soon," he added in a lower tone, "but we'll l'arn you."

"What! Do you think I am a revenue officer?"

"Guessed it the fust pop, dinged ef you didn't."

"Well, you were never more mistaken in your life.,'

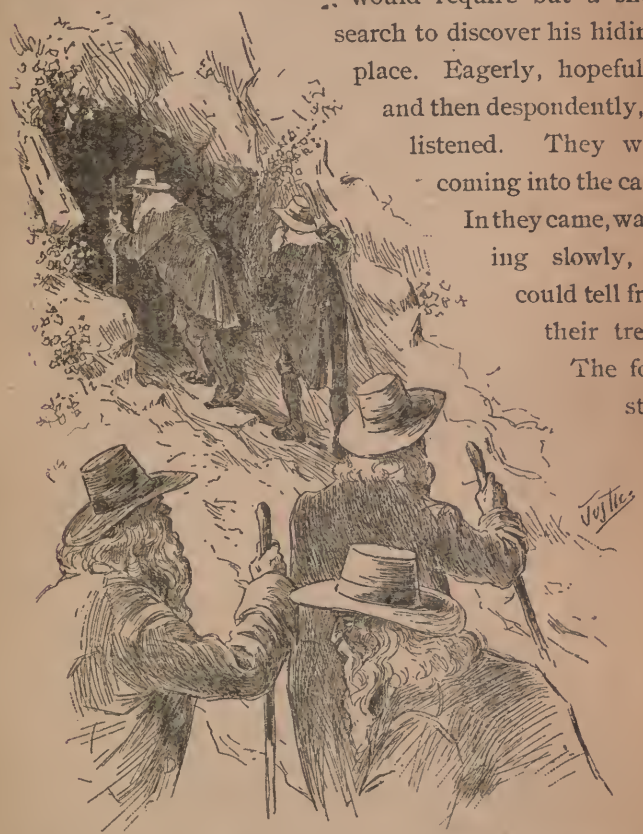
"We won't argy about that. You mout beat me in a argyment, fur that is in yo' line, mebby; but you kain't tie a rope no better than I kin. Tuck!" he shouted, "I hear the boys comin'."

Now what was to be done? Here was a jury that even a plodder could not convince. To stand there and wait for daylight meant to hang at sunrise. And an attempt to escape might mean death, but to be shot was better than to be hanged. He fancied that he heard the other men coming down the ravine. He heard Tuck sneeze. He remembered that in the growing darkness he had noticed that the other side of the ravine was not quite so steep. If he could crawl across he might climb out. He

got down and began to crawl. It was painful work, over the sharp stones. The ravine was not broad, and when he had about reached the middle of it he thought that he could see a flush in the east. Daylight meant instant death. He reached the other side. The wall was almost perpendicular. He crawled along the edge. There was no opening. He was getting closer to Tuck. He heard something, the sharp clank of one rock striking another. Daylight must be coming, for on the opposite side of the ravine, the west side was turning gray. This told that, even at early morning the east wall was not high enough to shut off the rays of the sun. But it was so high that Bryce could not reach the top. He lay close and listened and watched. He thought that he saw something move on the other side of the ravine. In a second a significant truth was made clear. Tuck was crawling up the ravine, to be close enough to shoot him, to carry off the honors of the chase. "I could kill the scoundrel," Bryce mused. "But, I won't; it would do me no good — mean my death, too." He crawled carefully along, halted and looked after Tuck. He had disappeared. Thinking that it was now safe enough to walk, Bryce arose and, bending over, cautiously felt his way along. Daylight was surely coming. He could see the tree tops, high up against a whitening mist on the west side of the ravine. Now he walked rapidly; now he could run. He saw a

break in the wall, but it was on the opposite side. No matter, he would cross. He did so and soon he was in a gulch that like a great slide-way came down from the mountain. He knew that they would follow him and he continued to press forward as fast as he could, and by the time the sun was fairly ablaze he had reached the mountain top. His aim now was to reach the river as soon as possible, and he sheered off in what he took to be that direction. He saw a cabin, but he gave it a broad go by. Later, he came within sight of a rude fence, and he ran from it. Thus all day he struggled onward. Toward evening he entered another ravine. He had traveled a long distance, but whether or not he had been followed he had no means of knowing. The bluffs on each side of the ravine were rugged and high, but he noticed that they could be climbed. The sun had gone behind a ragged rock-line. Bryce was picking his way along, looking for a place wherein to sleep. He came to a sort of cave, and stood hesitating whether it would be better to go into the wolf-den or to sleep under the stars. Suddenly his blood seemed to freeze. Down the ravine he saw five men slowly walking one behind another. No choice was now left him, and he sprang into the mouth of the cave. Inside he found a large chamber with uneven walls. The cave came to an abrupt end. He felt about, found a shelving rock, climbed upon it and lay down. His only

hope was that the men might not come into the place, for it would require but a short search to discover his hiding-place. Eagerly, hopefully, and then despondently, he listened. They were coming into the cave. In they came, walking slowly, he could tell from their tread. The footsteps



ceased. There was something strange about it all. Should he risk a peep at them? No; he was afraid to

move. What were they doing now? Gods! they were praying; but what a prayer. They began to rehearse a strange creed, and to implore that the promises made to their fathers might be fulfilled. Year after year, generation after generation, the will of the Master had been obeyed. They had kept the tenets of their faith a holy secret from the curious and vulgar world. They reminded the giver of their religion that they had just elected five of their handsomest maidens, according to the creed handed down to them, to serve during three years as the Wives of the Prophet — that they had chosen Mary, Rachel, Alma, Silvia, and Judith. They knew that these maidens should surely find favor in the eyes of the Prophet, should he come during the next three years; but that no matter when he should come he would find that the chosen people of his Father, the Lord, were ready to receive him. "We know not, O Lord," the prayer went on, "when it shall be Thy pleasure and Thy will to send the Prophet unto us — it may be this day, or it may be a hundred years hence, for time is naught to Thee — but we do with patience bide Thy time. Nor do we know, O Lord, by what sign we are to recognize Thy special servant, but we know that he will bring some unmistakable token. O Lord, we have renewed the covenant of our faith, given to our fathers, and we beg of Thee to prosper us, not indeed with many

numbers, but with contentment, and with minds pure in Thy sight."

Bryce heard them slowly filing out. The entrance to the place darkened, then lightened again. They were gone.

CHAPTER IV.

Bryce reached home on a Saturday, but he went not on Sunday to hear his friend preach. The sprouting of that small seed of reformation had promised much, had been a sort of comfort to the lawyer, but now the seed was but a dry shell and the sprout was dead. In the young man's mind throbbed a thought, thrilling, wildly delirious, and in that thought were the names Mary, Rachel, Alma, Silvia, Judith, whirling round and round. He had often heard of that strange religious community, and he remembered having heard his father say that the handsomest woman he had ever seen was in that village. The men and the women of that community had ever been looked upon as religious cranks of the most harmless sort; they had striven to stir up no commotion, but what a commotion they had unconsciously stirred in the breast of one human being! And those men knew not what signs the Prophet might bring. Was ingenuity, was adventurous passion ever so strongly tempted?

Several days had passed. Bryce was in his office, not lazily leaning on the table, not dreamily gazing, but

almost fiercely walking up and down the apartment. The door was slowly opened and Hartley stood there. "May I come in, Howard?"

"Of course, old fellow. How are you, any way? Sit down."

He sat down. The lawyer continued to walk up and down the room.

"Howard, you stole home so quietly that scarcely any one knew that you had returned."

"Oh, I didn't blow a trumpet when I got back. Neither did I go to a nunnery."

"Well, what sort of a time had you, where did you go, and why did you go in the first place?"

The lawyer smiled. "I went up the river, had a very good time—went because I thought that to get out of town for a few days would help me——"

"To make an effort," the preacher broke in.

"Well, yes, you may put it that way."

"But I don't want to put it that way unless it's the truth."

"Well, then, let us call it the truth."

"I am glad to hear you say that. And now you are ready to make the effort. Howard, you have been franker with me than you ever have with any one else, so now let us get at the secret of—what shall we call it?"

"Apply your own term, my boy. The priesthood should supply its devotees with choice figures of speech."

"Howard, you come back with the same disposition to bandy words. I am deeply interested in you, not so much as a preacher but as a friend. I see that you are wasting yourself, day by day; I feel that you are putting your fine abilities under your feet. I once thought that it was a great misfortune that your parents had not lived to see you ripen and grow strong in usefulness to the state and to society. I have not thought that of late, and yet I don't exactly know why. You seem to be possessed of a strange intellectual shiftlessness; there have been a number of times when the putting forth of half your strength would have set you high above the plodders, as you are wont to term your less gifted acquaintances, but with a perverseness that I can not fathom, you have refused to exercise that strength. You said that upon your return you would give me a hearing, but first I want to hear from *you*. You have made certain broken-linked confessions to me, have given or sought to give me glimpses of your condition of mind. Now tell me the whole truth. What is the trouble with you?"

Bryce sat down, carelessly drew another chair toward him, placed his feet upon it, remained silent for a few moments and then said: "Hartley, since you have taken so serious a view of my case, let me say that I don't know that there is anything so vitally wrong with me. You may say that I am not a success as a lawyer. I may

grant you this and at the same time remind you that to be a successful lawyer is not of itself an achievement high up among the virtues. But let all this go. Tell me about yourself. What have you done? Have you brought any one to believe in your religion, and are you prepared to swear that your religion is the right one? All religions, you must know, in that they carry a degree of sacrifice, have to a more or less extent the appearance of purity. But what one man may hold as pure, another man may condemn as wanton. But there is no religion so absurd, so open and palpable a mockery of true reason, as not to have among its followers men and women of acknowledged ability. Carrying out the faith of a certain religion, the most sacred laws of this land may be violated. Now, suppose I take up a religion of my own? Suppose I say that as Nature has given to man certain physical pleasures, it is his duty to seek those pleasures, to practice them as a creed? He can turn to nature and say, 'I have obeyed your instincts, I have not buried your promptings, I have lived as you directed.' Suppose I should say that nature is voluptuous and that I am a voluptuary. You can not deny that certain forms of lawful worship, the shouting at a mourners' bench, is a feasting upon emotion, a sort of mental voluptuousness."

"Howard, I am further than ever from an understanding of you. You not only muddy the water and obscure

yourself, but obscure me. So now I hardly know what I wanted to say."

"Don't say anything to disturb either of us. By the way, your marriage is not far off."

"Next month."

"And I am listed for best man, I believe."

"You know you are."

"But I don't think that I can be there."

"What! Why, you have promised."

"Yes, but I've got to leave town for—well, I don't know how long. I am going to Europe on business. It's a case of must."

"In that event I suppose I shall have to excuse you."

"Yes, it is a case of must. Get Bentley. He's all right, you know, since he won his case in the supreme court."

"Don't taunt me with that, Howard. I merely mentioned his success the other day for the reason that I thought you were interested in him."

"Oh, I am. He was always so delightfully stupid. You've got a regular situation—I mean a regular appointment—now, haven't you?"

"Yes, and the people appear to be much pleased with me. My hard study is now counting for something. One of these days I expect to have the largest church in the state."

"Oh, ambitious, eh?"

"Yes, for the larger my field, the larger my opportunities to do good. And my wife will be a great help to me."

"There's preacher for you, Hartley. A preacher's wife is always supposed to be a help to him. As for his being a help to her, why that is another question. His selfishness is regarded as a devotion to his calling. If there's a sacrifice to be made, his wife must make it. It's the cock saying to the hen, 'help me scratch up this worm and then you may watch me eat it.' But here, now, don't look at me that way," he added, getting up and placing his hand on the preacher's shoulder. "You know that when I begin to talk I never know when to stop and never do stop until I have gone too far. You know that I believe you to be wholly unselfish; you know that you are the one man in whose honesty I have a firm faith. I must go out now, Hartley. I don't know exactly when I shall start for Europe, but I'll make it a point to see you between now and then."

Down the street the lawyer walked alone. He recalled every word of the prayer in the cave. He would have forgotten a prayer at church. Time and time again he asked himself, "Was ever human passion so strongly tempted?" Why had that religion remained a secret during so many years and then to be revealed to him? Was it providential that he had gone to the mountains,

gone really without a cause, to be chased by illicit distillers and then to hear that prayer! "Gods!" he said, "suppose I should go there as the Prophet." He turned into a restaurant, and while sitting there, tasting nothing that he ate, he noticed a bright India ink star on the back of the waiter's hand.

"Who did that?" he asked.

"Old fellow that lives down on the river. Used to be a sailor."

"At what particular place by the river does he live?'

"In a shanty down at the foot of Broad Street."

Bryce went to the old sailor's shanty. The old man was there. "Do you make much of a living by picking pictures?" the lawyer asked.

"Not much of a living, sir, but it's the best I can do."

"Can you pick faces, handsome ones?"

"As putty as you can find in a book, sir."

"Well, I want five."

"You are joking, sir."

"I don't joke at the expense of a poor man's living. I want five pictures, heads of handsome girls, three on the right arm and two on the left. And I want a name placed above each one. Can you do that?"

"I can make the puttyest job you ever seen, sir."

"When can you begin?"

"Now, but you know, sir, that it will take some time."

"Which means that it will cost something, eh?"

"Well, you know, sir, that it's art, and art's high sometimes."

"All right," said the lawver, taking off his coat. "Do me a good piece of work, say nothing about it, and I'll pay you more than it's worth."

CHAPTER V.

The sun had just slanted into the afternoon. The men of Bolga were at work in the fields lying about the village; the women were weaving flax. In the air quaint old songs were floating, songs that might have been heard in Cromwell's camp. The weaving was done in one long room. Children were playing about the door. A woman came in with a bucket of water.

"Sisters," she said, "look out at that strange man standing in front of the temple."

"Strangers are more common now than they were when I was a girl." an old woman spoke up. "I remember that during a whole term when I was a Wife of the Prophet not an alien soul was seen here."

"But look, sisters," said the first woman, "see how strangely this man acts. He stands there waving his arms and they are bare. I will go to the field and tell the Father."

The Father was hoeing corn not far away. The woman ran to him.

"What is it daughter?" he asked.

"Father, the strangest of strange men stands in front of the Temple."

"Well, but is there any harm in him? Are we not here to protect you? Go your way, daughter. He is some idler come to gaze at us."

"But he stands there, Father, with his arms bare, making strange motions."

"I will go back with you."

When they reached the plaza, in the center of which the Temple stood, they saw that all the women and girls had quitted their work and that some of the most adventurous of the children had drawn near unto the stranger. The woman who accompanied the Father fell back, but the old man walked

boldly toward the man who had caused this unwonted stir.

"May I inquire," the old man asked, approaching, "why you have come hither and why you act so strangely? If you are in distress, tell me your trouble, and if I can relieve you, consistently with what I hold to be right, I will do so and send you on your way."

"I am in no trouble, reverend sir," the stranger replied, ceasing to make his motions. "I have been drawn to this place. Day and night have I wandered, not knowing which direction to take, but feeling that I was guided. And now, reverend sir, I should like to ask *you* why I am here?"

"You speak strangely," said the old man, halting. "Do you not know what induced you to come this way?"

"Not wholly, reverend sir. But it came upon me that I was wanted here—came upon me in a most mysterious way. I was far distant from here when suddenly there came a clap of thunder and a flash of lightning. I fell senseless, and when I came to, I felt that somewhere I had a sacred duty to perform. And I looked at my arms, for they were stinging, and there I found these pictures and these names, which must have been drawn by the lightning. Come and see for yourself."

The Father was now trembling at every joint. He tottered forward, caught sight of the pictures and the

names, and lifting his hands, he shouted: "Ring the temple bell!"

"But, Father!" cried a woman who stood near, "the bell has never been rung, is never to be rung until the Prophet is come."

"Ring, daughter!" he shouted, bowing his head. "Ring that the brethren may hear. The Prophet is come!"

The woman ran into the temple. The Father and the stranger stood with heads bowed. Loud and clear pealed forth the bell. And then from the fields the men came running. A chant, a strange hallelujah came from the awe-stricken group of women. The children in fright clung to their mothers. The Father lifted his hands and in a loud voice summoned his people into the temple. There were whisperings and shrinking back, there were exclamations of astonishment.

"Chosen people of the Most High!" the Father shouted, "be not afraid, for this day have you seen the fulfillment of the promise made to our fathers. Daughter," he called, addressing the woman who had come to him in the field, "command the Wives of the Prophet to make ready for the ceremony, for their lord is come."

Bryce, wretch that he felt himself to be, caught the spirit of this excitement. He looked sharply about him, and saw that the women were comely — some of them at least — and that the men were strong. He was

not there to guide, but to submit, to take the part assigned him. But why did not the five girls come? One of the Councilmen, carrying a dark robe on his arm, came to him after conferring with the Father, and said: "In the room over there is a place to bathe. When you have done that, put on this robe."

He entered the room, and the door was closed. The bath-tub was of stone, and he sat on the edge, when he had taken off his clothes, and mused over the strangeness of his situation. The brethren and sisters were singing a hymn. Hartley's sad face came up, but he brushed it aside. The enormity of his crime fell damp and cold upon him, and he strove to defend himself. Why had the revelation been made to him? That was his defence, and, lame though it was, yet it satisfied him. He bathed and put on the robe. Why were they keeping him there so long? A tap at the door. He stepped out into the Temple, and a chant arose. What a transformation met his view. The floor was carpeted with roses. He looked toward the main entrance and caught his breath. There came, walking one behind another, five girls, dressed in white, beflowered, beautiful. It was his time to act, and he advanced to meet them, slowly walking with hands uplifted. The girls joined hands and encircled him. Some of them wore lilies, others roses in their hair. They stood with heads bowed.

He saw their blushes; he caught sight of thrilling eyes. The chant was hushed. The Father approached. Bryce looked up. He was standing in front of an altar. Now the Father spoke. His deep words trembled from his lips. Bryce could not remember what he said; he caught but the meaning of a word here and there. The ceremony was simple and was soon over. There he stood, among his wives, shaking hands with the men and women who shyly came forward to greet him. He was glad that they looked upon him simply as a man. After all the real Prophet was to come — to come from among his offspring. Now the ranks were broken; there was no further ceremony. The mothers and the fathers of the Wives wept over their daughters, but in their tears there was no sadness. Bryce stood talking to the men. How sincere, how devout they were. How far back into the past he had been thrust he knew not. How strange a gathering; how marvelous a belief to exist at the electro-glaring end of the nineteenth century. How ruling is a faith; how it blinds reason, blots out incredulity.

"You must instruct me," Bryce said to the Father.

"All that you need to know you shall know in time. You, like the rest of us, are simply an instrument. You are indeed to be one of us, obeying our laws as we obey them. The only privileges which you possess are those conferred by your marriage. We do not

practice polygamy; that is forbidden except to the Prophet."

"You call me the Prophet, Father, and it may be well, but before coming here I had no thought of being a prophet. But those pictures, and a peculiar influence that came upon me, taught me that I was destined for something. I am not as yet fully acquainted with our creed, but you will find me a faithful servant."

"You know enough, my brother. Ah! how we have waited; and how our fathers and grandfathers waited. But you have come at last; and now shall arise the Savior of man, not to be despised, but at the proper time to be proclaimed a king. Then we shall march away in triumph to declare the glory of the one Great Father, to view the offer of true salvation unto man."

Now they were making preparations for the feast, and a simple feast it was to be. Strong, clear-cut features showed that gluttony was not a part of this religion, and vigor proved that neither was undue self-denial of food a feature of it. Tables, swiftly but not jarringly made of trusses and long boards — tables reminding one of old pictures of the Last Supper — were placed by light-footed men, spread by graceful women, and rose-strewn by girls. Chairs, stools and benches were brought. Bryce noticed that there was one table smaller and more profusely decorated than the rest. He was standing near this table

when the Father said to him: "Sit you there at the right." And then he added: "Come, Councilmen and Wives, sit here with the guest which the Lord has sent unto us."

When they were all seated, and when the Father had pronounced a short but impressive blessing, Bryce remarked: "Father, a flash from the clouds threw to me the names of my wives, but as yet I am unacquainted with the personality of those names."

"True, brother. To your right sits Alma, to her right is Mary. Over here is Rachel; there near Councilman Trent is Judith, and to my left is Silvia."

Bryce bowed to each one and muttered something. Was he in Fairy Land? Could all this be real? From the society which he had known could there have been gathered such grace of form? Eyes that had never been dimmed by a moment of dissipation, complexion fresh from the pure air of the mountains, lips that shared the secret of the red-bud tree—purity's unconscious sacrifice. The soft color of the earliest glow of sun-rise met his view as his eyes followed the nod of the Father as he called the names, and though the Father and the Councilmen could see naught save devotion to duty, this young man from the world thought that he caught a glimpse of a sweet mischief. He could not stare, but how drinking, how eager was his swift look from one to another. He noticed

Alma's neck, the silk-like hair looped up from it and pinned with a rose-bud. He saw the proud look of a woman at another table and he knew that she was Alma's mother, knew that this woman's pride in life had been to see her daughter a Wife of the Prophet.

"Did you ever expect that I should come?" he asked in a low tone, and Alma answered: "We were taught to pray for your coming."

"I hope you are not disappointed in me."

"The Lord would not send us a disappointment." She gave him a full view of her eyes as she said this, and the word that shot through his brain was—"glorious."

"No, he would not have sent a disappointment, for you were ready to accept *His* choice, but suppose I had come a wrinkled old man, would you have been as pleased with me?" He asked this in a whisper, and in a whisper she answered, "No."

Emotion clogged his mind, and but little of what followed remained in his memory. Lamps were brought and he knew that evening was come. A chant arose and swelling into great volume, floated to the mountains and then softened, etherialized, seemed to float back into the temple. The Father and the Councilmen gathered about the altar, and the Father, standing in the midst of them, preached a sermon. A strong wind must have come, for one of the heavy doors slammed; and the blaze of a lamp

leaped up and died in the darkness. The preaching was done. The Father and the Councilmen approached Bryce who was still sitting at the table with his wives.

"Brother," said the Father, "I know not what your name has been, but now it is Joseph."

Bryce bowed and thus replied: "Your will is mine." But he could not help but think of the inappropriate perversity of the name. He would have been the last man to leave a garment in the hands of a voluptuous tempter.

"Brother," said the Father, "we will now conduct you and your wives to your home, the house prepared for you by our fathers. Come."

Another song arose, and now in the dim light he saw one eager, hard and disappointed face. A young man approached and was gazing at Alma. But that face was soon forgotten

When they entered the Prophet's home, Bryce found himself in a large circular room, lighted by a single lamp, swung from the ceiling. The floor was of stone; the walls were white. He noticed five closed doors about the circle, and one door to the right standing ajar. To this latter room he was conducted. It was meagerly furnished with two chairs and a table, but no bed.

"Sit you here," said the Father. "We return to the temple to pray for guidance. Remain until I come."

Bryce heard the opening and the closing of the other doors. What a nuptual night! He was tremulous. And he wondered how it all was to be arranged, but would ask no question.

There was no lamp in this room, and save for the dim glimmer of lightning on the narrow window panes, lightning that came from the far west, the room was in blackest darkness. There was a low rumble of thunder as though a mountain gorge were growling. Bryce got up; he could sit no longer. He thought of a sister who had blessed him with her dying breath. "God Almighty! can she see me now?" he almost cried. Cold perspiration broke out upon him. "You are a fool," he said to himself

There was a tap at the door. His blood leaped. "Come in." The Father was in front of him. The old man whispered one word and then stood, pointing.

CHAPTER VI

Morning dawned with dewy freshness. The night had been wild, but all that was now left of that wildness was the louder gurgle of the streams that poured down from the higher mountains far away. With the first overpouring of light from the sun, a mocking-bird flew to the roof of the Prophet's house and trilled his thankfulness for a day so lavish in its splendor; and a cat-bird, less majestic in range, but almost as melodious, sang his praise in a syringa bush. The white spirea was in bloom, holding up its bridal wreath, and the rich scent of the calacanthus was mingled with the sunshine. The village was early astir, and a long horn that hung on the wall of the weavers' room was taken down and blown with a throbbing blast. Breakfast was ready. There were several dining-rooms, and families, as nearly as was convenient, were expected to eat together. The cooking was done in one large kitchen. The Prophet's dining-room was but a short distance from his dwelling. A long table was spread there, and any one was privileged to eat with him. The other Wives, together with the Father and Councilman Trent, were seated at the table when

Bryce and Alma entered the room. There was a flutter among the girls and a low mysterious whispering, which the Father reproved by a glance, and Alma, knowing that she was looked upon with curious concern, blushed under their attention.

"Brother Joseph," said the Father, "here are places for you and our daughter. We have waited for you."

"I hope that you have not waited beyond a time of easy paitence," Bryce replied.

"Oh, no; we have just sat down. See how beautiful the morning is," the Father added, waving his hand toward the door. "We can read a promise in its light and stillness. But at one time during the night we were threatened by a destructive storm. It was the lesson of life — the greatest good sometimes follows the appearance of evil."

"Father," said Bryce, "You must tell me what I am expected to do; how I am to deport myself."

"You will pick that knowledge mainly from observation. But of course I am willing to instruct you. We might say that you are the only convert that we have ever gathered from the world, and you were sent to us. Some time you must tell us how your early life was spent, but we shall have time enough for it all. To the vulgar, ours is a strange religion — all religions have at one time been strange to the vulgar — but the time is not far distant

when the vulgar mind shall be purified. To-day you will take an oath, and then you shall know what your imperative duties are. There are many things, however, that we can discuss openly, that is among ourselves, but amidst strangers you must keep absolute silence with regard to our creed. You must be careful in your reading; not that worldly books are so harmful to one whose mind is rightly set, but that it would be time thrown away. But good books are at all times to be commended. True rhetoric is the voice of God; therefore, strive to speak as becomes a godly man, the chosen seed, the propagator of one who is to offer salvation unto man. And these precious daughters you are to treat as though they were flowers from a holy garden, and they are to look upon you as their master. They are to love you and to obey you; and you must remember that it is the nature of woman to be petted. The little worries of a pretty head are to be soothed."

"Father, you spoke of my sharing your labors. What labor am I to perform, and when am I to begin?"

"Our men work in the field, and by turns teach our school. But work in the field is more of a needed exercise than a labor. We do not believe in wearing out the body merely to gather wealth; our wants are but few and are easily supplied. Nearly everything we need is grown here. We raise sheep, and our clothes are woven

here. Weaving is hard work, but no woman is forced to weave more than one day a week."

"Would that the whole world were so well governed," Bryce replied. "But tell me, do the laws of the state interfere with you?"

"As far as the law knows us," said the old man, "we are the children of meekest obedience. The constable never comes hither, and by courtesy we are excused from jury duty."

"That courtesy is apparent," Bryce replied. "A jury selected from among you would be too intelligent, too justice-loving. One clod on a jury — and they must always have a clod — would muddle eleven Isaac Newtons."

"Joseph, you speak as one who knows."

"Why not, Father? I was gathered from the world."

Bryce now had an opportunity to study not only the faces of his wives, but to place an estimate upon the Father and upon Councilman Trent. The belle who has left the ball-room late at night does not look so well at the breakfast table, but these girls were as fresh as the flowers that grew near the door. Their beauty winced not even in the sun-light. The type was nearly uniform, the grace of health, the perfection of skin, of teeth, of eyes. But of course he could see certain differences. Mary was a blonde, and Judith's hair was intensely black, but the

smooth oval of the face was the same. He wondered if they were all alike as to character; whether they possessed a hidden individuality that at some time might show itself. "All women are the same," he mused, "and yet how widely different."

The Father was exceedingly tall, proudly straight and with character marked on every feature. His nose was large and thin; his hair had never been cut, and his beard was long and grizzled. His eyes were dark, with a benevolent warmth in them, and yet they were sharp and questioning. He looked like the ruler of rude men, stubborn if needs be, but just and sincere. Trent was shorter, fleshier and without question, lazier.

"After breakfast," said the Father, "you may go to the warehouse and select a suit of clothes to fit you, and then you would better walk about and make yourself acquainted with your surroundings. You are not to cut your hair or to shave again. As a rule we are not antiquated, but we insist that no man shall shave. We care naught for the world, as the world now is, but you must have observed that our speech is not materially different from the speech of other men. There is a reason for this, for when the time for us to leave this village shall come, we do not wish to go back into the world as strangers in speech. And that is one of the reasons why we encourage the reading of good books. But do not give me credit for

this." Bryce had looked admiringly at him. "It was practiced by our grandfathers."

"Am I permitted to smoke?"

"Yes, pipes; but naught else. That which the Lord in his graciousness has inspired to grow out of our soil, we permit our people to use."

"While I was of the world," said Bryce, "I was fond of coffee. Would the drinking of it now be in opposition to your rule?"

"Decidedly. Coffee does not grow out of our soil."

"But is it not consistent to drink whisky? Corn grows out of our soil."

"And a bludgeon grows out of our soil, but shall we sieze it and with it crush a brother's skull?" Hereupon Councilman Trent gave a triumphant grunt, but the Father, averse to an applause that might mean the embarrassment of their new brother, cast upon the Councilman a look of mild reproof.

A few moments of silence followed. "Father," Bryce asked, "when shall I appear at the temple to take the oath?"

"At the setting of the sun."

Immediately after breakfast Bryce was shown to the warehouse, where he selected a suit of clothes, a long coat, knee breeches, thick cotton stockings and buckles made of horn. His hat was of rye-straw and his shirt was made

of the strongest and plainest linen. And he felt rather proud of his shapely legs when again he stepped out in full view of his wives, and he saw by their smiles and their nods that his new dress had awakened a fresh admiration. The men were now gone to the field, and Bryce heard the bump, bump of the looms in the weaving room. He looked about him, at the clean stone houses, the turf-grown, path-streaked plaza, the temple with its heavy brow, the great old English elms that many years ago had been set out in picturesque contempt of regularity—at the four high, wooded and graceful hills that arose from the corners of the broad field. How wise had been the selection of this basin, for although in the mountains it was sheltered from the cold winds. The fruit was rarely killed in the spring, and during the hottest weather of mid-summer the grass remained green. But for a moment this beauty, this harmony, this gracious smile of nature, smote him with a keen remorse. Would that he could have come hither as a real brother, as a sincere and virtuous man. He heard light foot-steps and turning saw Judith approaching with the charm of a timid draw-back in her manner. Remorse was gone.

"I am going with you," she said.

"Are you, sweet creature?"

A blush was her reply. "Where are we to go?" he asked.

"Whither you may direct. I can show you the woods and the flowers. But the creek is muddy and we can't see the fish."

"But I know that anything you show me will be beautiful."

She looked up at him and there was mischief in her eyes. "Was flattery inspired, or does it come from the world?" she asked.

"Truth may come from the world, sweet one, and yet have been inspired. Let us walk over there," he added, pointing toward the west hill. "Will you take my arm?"

"I am to show you and you are not to show me," she laughed. They had walked some distance, side by side, when she said: "I can beat you running."

"What!" he spoke up in surprise. "That would be undignified; wouldn't it?"

"No; not if you run gracefully. I can run faster than nearly any of the boys in the village; and I was almost sorry when I had to stop playing fox."

"But why did you stop?"

"Because I became a Wife of the Prophet."

"Oh! And you have one cause for regret?"

"It is hardly a regret."

"How old are you, Judith?"

"I shall be nineteen next month."

"You have never been away from home, have you?"

"Oh, yes; I have been over to the river a number of times, and once when I was very small I went away over to Knoxville."

"Why did you go so far as that?"

"I went with the men who took the linen to market. Oh, and it was the longest journey in the world, I thought. Have you ever been there?"

"Yes, and in hundreds of other places."

"Yonder is the creek," she said.

They were now skirting the base of the west hill. The ground was gently rolling. Summer had just begun to fulfill the gorgeous promises of spring. The fire-bush, under the flutter of a bird, threw down a lip-like bloom, and a lubberly owl, frightened out of his morning nap, sent down a pearl-like shower from the white-laced top of a wild plum tree. A wily old quail, pretending to be desperately wounded, fluttered in the path until her young ones had hidden themselves in the grass; and a gaunt rabbit, with his thin ears spectral in the sun's strong light, sought safety on the knoll where the mandrakes grew.

"Here is the creek, and it is not so muddy as I thought it would be," said the girl; and without giving him time to reply she ran on ahead and seated herself on a rock at the brink of the stream. He followed, laughing, and plucking a flower he handed it to her as he seated him-

self on the rock close beside her. The stream, swift from the higher lands, had shrunken from its flood-line, and by the slightest tarnish of its sheen held but a reminder of last night's storm. From far below, where the water poured upon a hollow rock, came a musical, echoing roar, changing in tone with the stir of the gentle wind, now almost hushed, now loud and resounding. They were under the shade of a beech tree, just above a point where two long lines of sycamores ended. In front of them were the rolling woods, through which they had passed; and back of them, far away, was a wild jolt of country, a great bluff and a tumble of rocks."

"What sort of books have you read?" he asked.

"Books that you might laugh at," she answered. "Some of them have been very dull, with long words without music in them, but some of them have been sweet with the perfume of flowers.

"Were any of them stories of love?"

'No!" she answered, looking at him in surprise. "Love, we think, is too sacred to be put into a book." Her hands, holding the flower, were clasped in her lap. He put his hand upon them, and she caught her breath with sudden quickness.

"Did you ever read of sailors cast away at sea, of people thrown upon strange islands?" He was thinking now of the India ink pictures on his arms.

"We have no such books," she answered.

He noticed a young man walking a short distance below on the opposite shore, and he thought that he remembered having taken a closer look at his face, and he asked: "Who is that?"

"Benjamin, the son of Councilman Blake. I will tell you something if you'll promise not to say anything about it."

"I promise."

"Well, he is Rachel's brother, and was engaged to marry Alma."

"Then he must hate me. I remember how hard he looked at me yesterday evening."

"Hate you? How can he hate you? Was it not the will of the Lord that you should be taken from the world and placed among us; and was it not ordained that you were to be the husband of the Wives? He can't hate you."

"When were he and Alma to be married?"

"They were to have been married last fall, but Alma's mother begged her, and then the council commanded her to wait, until after the new election of the Wives. I wonder if he is coming over here? No; he has turned off into the woods."

"I am sorry for him. He took it greatly to heart, didn't he?"

"He said nothing. How could he?"

"But Alma — did she appear to grieve over it?

"You ought to know," she answered, turning her face from him.

"But I don't know. Was she grieved?"

"Who among us would decline to be a Wife of the Prophet?" she simply remarked.

"But that is not answering my question."

"I don't think," she said, "that Alma loved him very much. Would it relieve you if I were to say that I know she did not?"

"Well, yes, as I am far from desiring to bring trouble to the breast of any one."

"Would you be so much concerned about me?" she asked, looking him full in the eyes.

"I could say more, but I shall say only yes. Judith, you must know that you are a beautiful creature."

"You must not talk to me that way. You were sent to us, but you are simply a man, selected from among a world of men, and although I am a Wife of the Prophet, yet I am strongly human. I am no doll; I am a woman."

"Judith, suppose that I were to tell you that I love you deeper than I love any of the others."

"Oh, if you could tell me that and tell the truth, it would make my heart blaze—but what am I saying? We must not talk this way. But I do want to be loved by

you, for to me you are beautiful and your words are as music." She looked at him, and this man who had made himself a master of innocent hearts, a thief in virtue's home, blushed under her gaze. But he put his arms about her and pressed her head to his bosom. She made no effort to restrain him. Was he not her husband? Had not the religion of her fathers sanctified their marriage? He looked down at her ringletted black hair, at her beautiful neck so soft and white—her head bent slowly further backward, she put up her arms—their lips met, warm and throbbing.

A shrill whistle startled them. Benjamin had come out of the woods, and was standing on the opposite shore a short distance down the stream.

"He is keeping watch of us," said Bryce. "I shall ask the Father if this fellow——"

"No, you must not," she quickly broke in. "We must pay no attention to him. Oh, look where the sun is. It is nearly dinner time and we must go back to the village."

As they were walking back to the village he asked: "Were your people——"

"Our people," she interrupted, correcting him.

"Well, then," he went on, "were our people never afraid that a false prophet might come?"

"Why, no. How could a false prophet come? How was he to know anything about our religion?"

Could she have read his thoughts at that moment, she would have seen these words: "How blinder than a bat in the sun-light is human faith. How much proof, and how much argument are required in a court of law, and yet in spiritual things how thin a pretext can pass as a God-sent truth."

"If you care to walk so far," she said, "we will go over to the Witch Hole after dinner. But it is nearly five miles from home."

"What sort of a place is it?"

"It is a broad and deep hole away down the creek, within sight of the place where the creek empties into the river. And I don't suppose that there's any place in the river that is half so deep. I heard the Father say that his grandfather took a large rock and let it down more than a hundred and fifty feet with a rope and found no bottom. And you must not say anything about this, but a long time ago, one of the brothers went crazy and drowned himself there. No, not exactly there, but just above there. Probably he thought the water there was too deep for him. Please don't tell Alma or any of the others what we have talked about."

"Not a word. What you have said to me is sacred."

When they entered the dining room, they found the other Wives, Councilman Blake and his son Benjamin already seated at the table. The Councilman was a hearty, bluff old fellow, with a resonant voice; he made broad gestures when he talked, and was fond of talking. Bryce had seen young Benjamin's hard and eager gaze, had seen him idly skulk along the creek, and had fancied that he must at all times be a clown with a sullen brow. But he now found that his estimate was wrong, that the young man was of strong and attractive mold, with eyes that could appear frank as well as eager, and with a countenance that bespoke determination.

"We hope," said the Councilman, "that you had a pleasant time, and that you are pleased with your surroundings. But it will no doubt take you some time to become accustomed to your changed condition. It is true that I know but little of the world, but I can well imagine what it is to be taken from a busier life and set down here in this never broken quiet."

"Oh, I should think that he would be delighted," Benjamin spoke up. "We have often heard of people who became so tired of the world that in order to get out of it they killed themselves; but I cannot fancy that one would like to leave this place."

"Benjamin is right," Bryce replied. "I never knew what peace was until this holy religion was made known to me."

"I am glad to hear you thus express yourself," the Councilman rejoined. "Indeed, everything connected with your coming has been most befitting. You came without pretense, as one who desired to be taught. With us, you must know, prophet does not mean one who is inspired, but one directed. You have a mission, and that mission does not depart from a human agency; you were not expected to foretell events but to wait for events. You have had one privilege, aside from your marriage, which has not been granted to anyone else: you have been permitted to discuss, and to hear discussed, our

faith, without having taken the oath of creed, but that oath was implied. You must have indeed felt strange when those images and those names were flashed upon your arms. They could have come from no place but the clouds. Not far from here, many years ago, I have heard, a man was struck by lightning while standing under a tree, and when they were dressing him for burial they found upon his breast a picture of the tree drawn by the lightning. This was a marvel at the time; but how much greater marvel to one, who does not understand, are the pictures and the names drawn upon your flesh. But to the chosen few it is simple — the fulfillment of a promise. When you came, to restrain undue curiosity among the women and children was impossible; but you have doubtless noticed that since then there has been no embarrassing attention bestowed upon you."

"Brother," said Bryce, "I have never seen such modesty, such refinement, such taste."

"It was the grace of courteous restraint," Benjamin remarked. "Undue enthusiasm is a human weakness. Nature's work, with God standing back of it, is orderly, except when nature destroys, and then there is fury."

Bryce looked at him and wondered what must be passing through his mind, what hidden fire had shot forth this blaze. Had their simple school taught him thus to express himself? Could he think thus swiftly and yet

put faith in so unreasonable a creed? But reason halts at the threshold of creed. Even within hearing of the wild roar of trade, men, who would have reasoned with a Plato, view in ecstacy the trickster's slate-scratching, and hear with emotion the senseless rapping under a table.

"After dinner," said Judith, "we are going over to Witch Hole."

Alma looked up and her dark eyes grew darker. "Why go so far?" she asked. "Is there no seclusion nearer the village?"

"We were not looking for seclusion, but for places of interest," Judith replied.

"*We!*" Alma repeated, and she spoke with such stress that the Councilman looked at her. And now Benjamin could not hide a frown.

"It is most too far to walk unless one sets out earlier," said the Councilman. "Brother Joseph may not be used to such exertion. Our daughters, Brother," he added, "are strong. The lacings, and the unnatural artifices with which some women distort themselves, are unknown here. In the town, whither we go to sell our linen, I have seen women girdled and squeezed almost to breathlessness, and shod in a most cramped and painful way — the appliances of Satan made to shorten life and restrict usefulness. Brother, the circular room of the Prophet's house

has been fitted up for a place to sit in during the warm hours of the day and evening. And there we may often meet and hold profitable converse."

"Then let such of us as may desire meet there this afternoon," said Bryce, who fancied that he saw a storm-cloud gathering. Alma gave him a grateful look, and Benjamin frowned again. Judith lifted not her eyes; her face was scarlet.

CHAPTER VII.

After dinner, Bryce lighted a pipe, and going out to an elm tree, lay down on the soft sward. He dozed off to sleep and he dreamed of his office in the city. He looked at his book shelves and there were great volumes labeled Treachery, Infamy, Falsehood, Cowardice, Villainy. He looked out through the door, and walking past were the friends who had flattered him, but now they reviled him. Among them was a graceful girl and she alone halted in front of the door; and there she stood with her hands covering her face. He wondered who she could be. Her raiment was white, gauzy as a mist and it flowed in waves about her, although the atmosphere seemed dead. The mockers continued to pass but they jostled her not; indeed, their countenances when they turned them upon her, showed a deep and passionate sorrow. Suddenly she removed her hands from her face. His sister! He groaned aloud, and some one touched him. He awoke with a start. Judith sat beside him.

"Oh, you frightened me," she said. 'You must have had an awful dream. Your face was horror stricken and you groaned so loud."

"Yes," he said, sitting up, "I dreamed that you had fallen into the Witch Hole and that I had jumped in after you, but that you had gone down and I could not find you."

"You must not dream such things. There is company in our house and I have come after you."

In the center of the circular room were placed chairs, and rugs made of coon skins, and there was a sort of divan made of twisted hickory saplings and covered with a bright purple cloth, colored with dye stuffs gathered in the woods. The Father was sitting on this divan and when Bryce entered he moved over and said: "Brother Joseph, sit you here beside me."

Bryce obeyed. There were present the five Wives, several Councilmen and two women who had just come from the weaving room. How clean every one looked, and how attractively the women were dressed, how graceful they were in their easy gowns. And while white prevailed, yet any one among the women was permitted to dress in colors. The colors, too, were tasteful and harmonious. Alma now wore a scarlet cap, while Rachel wore a robe purpled with the juice of the elderberry.

The Father, noticing that Bryce looked from one to another, remarked: "You see that we are not cramped by a dull uniformity, Colors come from our soil and they belong to us. We simply insist that becoming modesty

shall govern everything. Cleanliness is one of our laws. There is a public bath just beyond the Temple, and everyone, upon coming from work, is expected to bathe. Brother, where were you born?" And without hesitating a moment, Bryce answered: "In Devonshire, England."

"It is well," said the father. "And were you in that country when you first were influenced to turn your steps in this direction?"

"I felt a strange yearning to come to America, but not until some time after I reached here did the influence fall strong upon me. I was in the State of Missouri, gradually making my way hitherward when the lightning threw the pictures upon me. After that I was strongly urged, almost impelled in this direction."

"In earlier life what calling had you thought to follow?"

"At an early age I fancied that I had been called upon to preach, but when I sought to make a selection I found that I knew not what form of religion to embrace."

"But you know now."

"Yes, for all things, I might say, have been made clear."

"Yea, and you are to preach—we all preach. Regular services are held in the Temple every Sabbath, a day which to the world means Saturday. Silvia, my dear, can you not sing for us?"

"I am hoarse to-day, Father," the girl answered.

"Brother," said the Father smiling, "by right of blood she thinks that she has a privilege to quibble with me. She is the daughter of my body as well as the daughter of my creed; she is my only child. She was ambitious of course, to become a Wife of the Prophet, but I strove to discourage her, fearing that my advocacy might have the appearance of a worldly partiality, but the voice of the Council elected her. She is young and has much to learn, and I therefore beg of you to be patient with her."

"She is sweet, pure and modest," Bryce replied, bowing, "and the Divine Master could not give to a woman three graces more becoming."

How easy and how free was this company. The girls talked among themselves and their talk was of the trivial thing that concern the young, yet the Father sat there a religious ruler, an autocrat of a creed and turned not the cold eye of discouragement upon their mirth. And in this how different he was from the average human who feels that he holds in sacred keeping the keys and the seals of spiritual affairs. Bryce hinted at this and the old man remarked: "A severe countenance is not a communication from God, while laughter might bespeak His holy presence. If God is always frowning, why have we flowers and streams that flash and sing in the sunlight? Man must guard against trivial things, it is true; but good humor is not trivial—it is the voice of health."

Bryce looked at him and wondered what must have been the line of his tolerant ancestry. Through many a gentle generation must his blood have been filtered; and how strange it was that a man so resourceful in the field of homely reason should not turn upon his own faith and wither it. And yet he knew men who lived in a city, who read under the electric light, who heard the phonograph sing—college bred men, who were just as blind in their acceptance of a creed. He thought of the absurdities of the early christians, who are saints now, how they scourged themselves; of the learned professors at early Oxford who urged the belief that the world could last but a few years longer. So, after all, in the light of the world's universal inconsistency, all creeds were consistent.

The afternoon wore on pleasantly and when the shadow of the west hill had fallen upon the sward where the children were playing, when a blast from the horn that hung on the wall of the weavers' room had echoed back from the far-off mountain where the rocks lay in a tumble, the Father arose and said: "Joseph, with you I shall go to supper, and then with me you will go to the temple, there to receive the oath."

The meal was deliberate with talk and with a song from Silvia who had repented her earlier refusal; and when they came out, darkness had fallen upon the land. The four Councilmen were outside, waiting for Joseph and

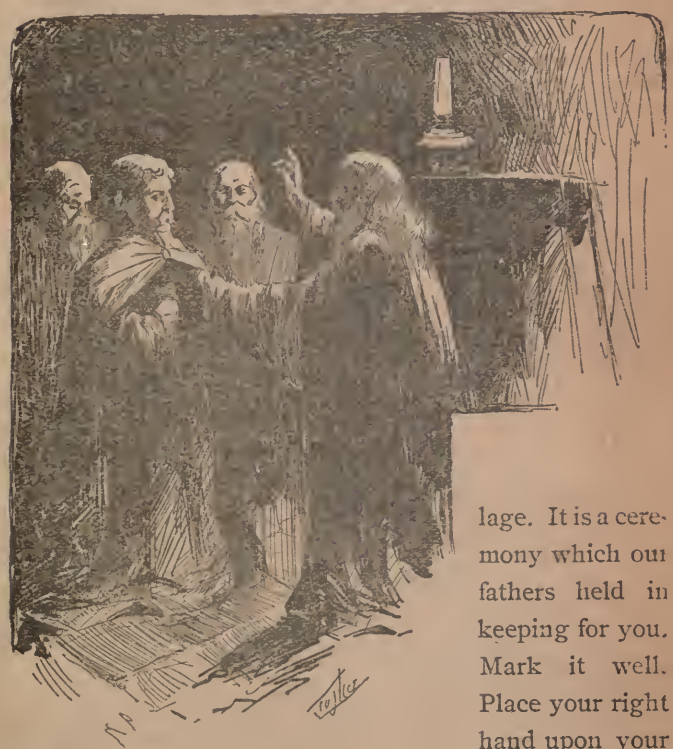
the Father. The air was still. Out of some great and forever dark gorge of the mountains a silence seemed to have come, brooding its way to the village and there to settle, even to deaden the evening chirrup of nature.

None save the candidate, the Father and the Councilmen was to be present at the ceremony. The Father took Bryce by the right hand, Councilman Trent took him by the left, and thus, slowly walking, they conducted him to the temple. There was no idle gathering to gaze at them; the plaza was deserted; the people were in their houses, praying. There was but a single light in the village, a small lamp carried by Councilman Blake. They entered not under the portico, but went through a small door which Bryce had not before noticed. He was conducted into a room, small and hung in black. Councilman Blake placed the lamp upon an altar, and then every one sank upon his knees, all save Councilman Trent who had disappeared. Suddenly Bryce was startled by the tolling of the great bell. In the days of his wildness, John Bunyan might have rung that bell, and gazing at it in the hour of his sin-cursed dispair, he might have trembled lest it should fall upon him. For a long time not a word was spoken, but the bell continued, slowly tolling.

"Arise!" the Father commanded. "Bring the robes."

Black robes were brought, and one of them was placed upon each man, including the candidate. "Kneel!" the

Father commanded. And when they had obeyed, the old man continued: "Joseph, the bell which Councilman Trent is tolling, was never before tolled in this village. It is a ceremony which our fathers held in keeping for you. Mark it well. Place your right hand upon your heart, and your left hand upon my heart." Bryce obeyed. "Now, repeat after me: 'Obeying the will of



the Omnipotent God of the universe, I have come to this spot to perform the duties embodied in the holy creed given fresh from heaven into the hands of my fathers." He waited for Bryce to repeat the words, and then continued: "I do not come with any especial mark of holiness upon me, therefore I am not privileged to break the customs of the people whom God has chosen for his own. I am an instrument to be directed, and must obey the laws. I must hold the creed as a sacred secret, until the proper time shall come to make it known, when the son of my body, inspired from heaven, and directly from the Omnipotent God, shall step forth as the Savior of mankind. And my own salvation shall depend upon Him as though I were the humblest among God's people, and I shall meet with no more reward than if I were not by physical ties related to Him; for when the time is come all natural ties shall be broken, and naught but the divine tie shall remain. And if, prompted by rebellious flesh, I should seek to disobey the commands, which are so clearly defined unto me, I hope to receive forgiveness as other transgressors are forgiven.'" Bryce repeated the last word and waited, but the Father had ceased to speak. But he continued to kneel, with Bryce's left hand pressed hard against his heart. The bell had ceased to toll, and Councilman Trent had entered the room and was kneeling near the Father. The old man gently put Bryce's

hand from him, looked up, and said: "I told you, Joseph, that you had but little to learn from this oath, and indeed it is not an oath as our people know that ceremony." Another minute of silence fell upon the group, and then the Father said: "Kneeling thus, away from the sight of man and within the sight of God, let us pray for the early fulfillment of the hopes that lie so close to our hearts, that lay so close to the hearts of our grandfathers and our fathers. I know that under the rule of nature I shall not in the flesh see the ripening of those hopes, but my spirit shall be with the brethren on that great day, singing praises unto the Most High God. Let us pray."

Deep and rich was his voice in prayer, and in the energy of his faith, vibrant and thrilling were his words. With bowed head he remained kneeling for a few moments after his utterances had died in a whispered "Amen," and he seemed to be breathing a prayer which was too sacred for human ears to hear; and Bryce, in his exploring fancy, wondered if he were imploring the giver of his religion to grant divine motherhood unto Silvia, his own daughter.

"Councilman Trent," said the old man, arising; "take your lamp, and lead us forth."

Slowly they filed out, and when Bryce felt upon his cheek the cool breath of the night he looked up and saw

lights glimmering here and there: they had sprung up when the bell ceased to toll. They went to the house of the Prophet, where a company was gathered. Judith met them at the door, and now it was she who was to sit with Bryce on the settee made of hickory saplings. Among the company were several elderly women, and how smooth and tranquil their lives seemed to be. Household cares, and the strain of maternity had not fretted the light out of their eyes. One woman told of a time when she had been a wife of the Prophet. The ruler of the American people, President Polk, had passed through the village while going to the mountains to hunt. She remembered it well, for the very next year an epidemic broke out in the village, and a large number of the chosen people had died. The Father, laughing and winking at Bryce, asked her if she thought that the passing through of the president had caused the epidemic, whereupon she pretended to be greatly perplexed at him; but she was full of laughter, and she said that the Father was never so happy as when he found an opportunity to twist her meaning to suit his own mischievous ends. Councilman Trent told of a bear that he had killed, and it was the last one that had been seen in that neighborhood. It was a cold morning, away back in the thirties, the time of the big snow. He was coming along near the Witch Hole when he heard his dog howl, and looking about he saw a

bear crushing him. He had no gun, but he had a long knife, and with it he killed the bear. And the Father was now called upon to verify the story, as he had doubtless been called upon a hundred times before. Young Benjamin, who had just come in, said that there were animals that were far more dangerous than bears; that they did not go about crushing the bones of dogs, but crushed the hearts of men.

"Benjamin," said the Father, "your reading and your meditation must have been more extensive than mine. What sort of animals are they?"

"I do not know their names," the young man answered.

"Then, my son, do not assert so intimate an acquaintance with them."

The elderly women laughed and some of the girls clapped their hands, and Benjamin sat there, looking down.

"Let us have a song," said the Father. "Alma, sing us that ballad of the strong man who buckled on his armor and fought for the suffering and the weak."

"I would, Father, but I have forgotten some of the words."

"But you have the words in a book. Where is it."

"In my room, I think. I will go and see."

She went to her room, and for the first time Bryce

noticed that it was numbered "three." "It isn't in here," she said, stepping out.

"I had it yesterday," Judith spoke up. "Look in my room."

Bryce saw her go into room "four." Judith sat beside him. He looked at her, and their eyes met. The song-book was brought and the old ballad was sung. The Father said that bed-time had come and the company rose to go. "With your permission," Bryce remarked, speaking to the old man, "I will walk home with you."

"Thank you," the Father replied, taking his arm; and together they walked away. When Bryce returned the circular room was deserted. The door had been left open, and the hanging lamp was slowly swinging. He stood there for a moment, meditating. His mind went back over the day just ended; again he heard the echoing roar of the creek, and again he saw Judith, flushed and beautiful, as she sat beside him on the rock.

CHAPTER VIII.

Bryce was meditatively walking about the circular room at early morning waiting for Judith to get ready for breakfast, when Silvia came out of room number "five." Just then Judith came and together the three walked across the plaza to the room where breakfast was ready to be served. Councilman Boyle, the father of Alma, sat at the head of the table. He was tall, spare and of severe countenance; he had no compromises to make, looked upon a trifling foible as the promise of a monstrous sin, a Puritan in his faith and of his creed a doctrinaire. He asked a blessing as though he were making a demand and snapped his "Amen" as though he had popped it off with a whip. He praised God not so much for the heaven He had promised as for the hell He had insured.

"Brother Joseph," he said, looking hard at Bryce, "you and our two daughters are lagging this morning. The dew is almost off. Dry grass should not find a man in bed."

"Not unless he has slept in the hay," Bryce replied, attempting to turn it off with a pleasantry. But the

Councilman wanted no pleasantries. He gave Bryce a brow-knit look and rejoined: "Let us not prattle a resentment in palliation of a duty neglected."

The girls bowed in submission to this rebuke, and Bryce bowed too, but he could have laughed at this stilted bigot. Into most remote corners does the world send its representatives of fanaticism. The Pharisee lives on the mountain and in the dell; he sits in the counting house and stands in the pulpit. And his influence unconsciously works in harness with the influence of the generous wanton—one gives to virtue a hard and crabbed aspect, the other bedecks vice with a rose.

They were eating in silence when their Father appeared at the door. How pronounced was the contrast between him and Councilman Boyle, the contrast that lies between broad strength and narrow weakness.

"Brother Joseph, what are you going to do to-day?" the Father asked.

"Father, my hands are ready for any work that is ready for them," Bryce answered. Councilman Boyle nodded in approval of this, but the Father replied: "The work is not pressing and can wait. As I told you yesterday, it is better that you should become acquainted with your surroundings. Silvia will show you about; she is strong, albeit she is slight, and will set you a sharp pace."

"In one quarter of the meadow where the ground is

dryest the hay is ready to be cut, Councilman Boyle remarked.

"Then let you and I whet our scythes and get at it," the Father replied.

"It is well," said the Councilman, bowing, but Bryce knew that it was not well with him, that he looked upon this honeymoon idleness as he would have regarded all idleness, a sin to be repressed. At Bryce's right hand Silvia sat, and leaning closer to him, she said in low words: "Yesterday you spoke of going to the Witch Hole. Let us go to-day." Hereupon Judith looked up. "It was too far yesterday, we were told."

And Silvia, smiling, thus replied: "You were told so because the day was half spent. Joseph, I will carry our dinner in a basket." She was a willful little creature.

Bryce asked if Witch Hole were a good place to fish, and the Father answered that Councilman Trent could tell him of great fish that had been caught there. But he cared not to hear a fish story, and above all not caring again to hear the story of the bear, the very last one seen in that neighborhood, he sought no advice from Councilman Trent. They were told that the best way to go was to follow the creek: that the distance was greater, but that the ground was not so rough. While Bryce was arranging his tackle, a thick cane rod and a strong flax line, Silvia prepared the luncheon and placed it in a wil-

low basket. Bryce asked her to let him carry it, but she drew back and said: "You must not rob me of all the pleasure of going. Councilman Boyle will tell you that where there is no work there is no enjoyment. No; you carry the pole, and you will find it heavy enough by the time we get there."

They passed along the path which Bryce and Judith had trod the day before. The polygamist was not now troubled even with a fleeting self-reproach, and the bloom, the grass, the view, that was rolled out with a tangle here and there, smote his sense of the beautiful, the romantic. They came within hearing of the hollow roar of the creek, and it was not so loud as it had been yesterday; they came within sight of the rock whereon Bryce and Judith had sat. They passed near the rock, and he saw lying there the dried flower that the girl had held in its freshness the day before, but it seemed a long time ago. Here it was that Benjamin had skulked along the shore, and here was where the water poured upon the hollow rock. The tall man looked down at his graceful little companion. She wore a loose-fitting gown, woven of lamb's wool and fine cotton, dyed a bright blue with some sort of berries, and girdled at the waist with a white cord. He stepped from a high rock, and turned to help her down, but she leaped past him with a laugh.

"You are a fawn," he said, catching up with her.

"You must have been used to a strange sort of women," she replied.

"Surely not accustomed to gazelles," he rejoined. "Such a pace as this could not be kept by any woman that I knew in the world. There man may cultivate strength, but women, many of them at least, strive to look delicate. They think that to be strong is to be rude. But they are getting away from that idea. They ought to come up here and take a few lessons of you."

The other route to the Witch Hole might have been less smooth, but this was rough enough. In places there was a descent so sudden that they had to climb down; the creek swirled

to the right and to the left and then tumbled in a roaring fall. Wild was the scene, pathless; but in that wildness, amid those giant rocks, leaning far over and threatening to tumble from the bluff high above and choke the stream with their monstrous bulk, what a pulpit there was in which to stand and shout in admiration of nature's tragic mood. They stood upon a dangerous ledge, and with a sense of peril, that sweetened the enchantment of the scene below, looked far down the stream. This man forgot his villainy. He was no longer the most infamous of all thieves, cankered with lust in the home of the innocent, but of the sublime a soulful worshipper. His head was uncovered — it was a revival of the good that was within him, that he had put under his feet. In his breast an excitement fluttered, and to the girl who stood beside him he was grand and noble. She spoke to him, and back to him flew the impulses that had driven him, throbbed him to the old sailor's retreat, to the portico of the temple, there to stand with pictures on his arms.

"When we have climbed one more steep place we can see the Witch Hole," she said. "You look sad. Are you sorry you came?"

"Sorry! Why, little sweetheart, I am charmed. Are the bluffs high at the Witch Hole?"

"On one side, but the ground slopes on this side and we can sit on the grass."

The creek, fed by noisy rills, was now almost a river, and the country on the opposite shore was as wild as the wake of a hurricane. In one place the gray spur of a great mountain had been cut off with square precision, like a winter's straw stack, trimmed by an economic farmer; and further down a deep gorge appeared to slope back from the stream, as though it would urge the water to quit its age-worn course. But along the shore where Bryce and Silvia strolled, the earth dipped down in pleasant dells. Now they stood on a grassy slope, and in front of them was the Witch Hole. How well did this dark, brooding pool beseem its name. The water was so blue that it was almost black. The river, not far away, had checked the swift current of the creek, slowly was drinking it, and on the pool a hawk's feather sailed round and round. Dismal were the surroundings; the opposite shore was not a shore, but a wall scarred with red, the smear of an ancient soil, and high at the top a lone scraggy tree stood, with it roots sucking the seams of the rock.

With many a dainty touch the girl spread the luncheon under a post-oak tree. The place was so steep that Bryce told her that she would better eat with one hand and hold to him with the other to keep from falling, and then he asked: "The name of this place is appropriate enough, but how did they happen to call it Witch Hole?"

"Because a witch used to live here a long time ago," she answered. "And they say that instead of being a hag she was a beautiful girl. And when she saw a man coming she would jump into the pool and pretend to be drowning. Men who had never heard of her would jump in to get her out and she would drag them under and drown them and then raise up out of the water and laugh about it."

"I dare say she carried on a great industry," Bryce replied. "And she was wise in having herself appointed a beautiful girl instead of a hag. For all purposes of destruction a handsome girl is always more effective than an old woman. And it is not necessary for the girl to be a witch; to be bewitching is quite enough."

"Joseph, I don't know what you are talking about."

"No? Well, it's better that you don't. Let me ask you: Did any of the people of Bolga ever go wrong?"

"Yes, but you must never mention it in the village. A long time ago, before I was born, a girl ran away with a man and married him. They did not hear of her for a long time, but one cold day she came back, bringing her child with her. She said that her husband had beaten her and had then deserted her. It was whispered about that Councilman Boyle wanted to put her to death and that my father wouldn't let him. And I believe he would have done it, too, for he is very strict. She got on her

knees, I have heard, and begged and told them that although she had married in the world, yet she had never told anything about our religion."

"Is she still living?"

"No, she died when the mountain fever came, five years ago."

"What became of her child?"

"She is Mary, your wife."

"What!" Bryce exclaimed.

"Yes, and she didn't think that she was going to be elected, but she had no trouble whatever. Oh, Councilman Boyle might have opposed her until he saw that Alma, his daughter, was sure to be elected. Mary doesn't know about her mother's running away—that is, I don't think she does, for I don't think that any one would be mean enough to tell her. Isn't she modest? And she was one of the brightest girls in the school. Oh, did you see that fish jump up!"

"Yes, I did," Bryce answered, reaching for his rod. "Hah, what a fool I am," he said. "I have come off without any bait. But I've got a fly hook and I'll catch a minnow. The first thing, though, is to get a grasshopper."

"Oh, let me get one," she cried, and by the time he had made ready with his fly-hook, she was there with the grasshopper. He caught a minnow, a steelback, and it

was rather large but he decided to try it. He threw far out into the pool and stood there expectantly waiting. He dangled the minnow about on the surface of the water, he walked up and down the bank, at times almost slipping into the water, and finally he decided to set his rod and wait. Silvia was sitting under the post-oak tree with her lap full of flowers. He sat down beside her. She looked up at him and her face was bright with happiness. She suffered him to put his arm about her, to kiss her. "Would it make you happier to know that I love you more than all the others?" he asked.

"That would not be right," she answered. "You must love us all just the same."

"But that would be quite impossible."

"Oh, not impossible when it was intended to be that way."

"But who says that it was intended to be that way? If it is a part of our religion it has not been made known to me?"

"Hasn't it? Well then you may love me just a little bit more than you do the others." He gave her a quick, playful hug, pretending to use great strength; it was more the act of fondling a child than the passionate impulse of a lover.

"You are the sweetest little creature I ever saw," he said.

"And how long am I to remain sweet; until I get mad at something?"

"Do you ever lose your temper? Or do you throw it away out of mere mischief?"

"I don't know whether I lose it or throw it, but I know that it gets away sometimes. A little thing sometimes makes me awful mad."

"Where did you pick up the school girl use of that word awful? You give it the light meaning that the city woman attaches to it."

"Do I? Then I can go back to the village and put on airs, can't I? Won't that be nice? But wouldn't Councilman Boyle give me a raking? I will tell you something else if you won't say anything about it. I don't know why I talk to you this way. I am not afraid of you a bit. I thought all men were rough, simply because they are strong, but they are not. But let me see. What was I going to tell you? Oh, yes. Why, not long ago while one of the girls was walking along the creek where some men must have been fishing, she found a paper covered book and she read it and a whole lot of us read it, although we knew that we ought to have shown it to some Councilman first, but if you would ask the girls about it now they might tell you they hadn't read it, for it did raise a muss. Councilman Boyle found it out and he declared that not one of us should ever be a Wife of the

Prophet, but then he had to come down, for some one told him that Alma had read it, too."

"What was the book about?"

"Oh, it told of a whole lot of people, of girls that wore the prettiest dresses that your ever did hear of and of men that talked sweet to them. Oh, look there."

Bryce sprang toward the fishing-rod, and in his headlong eagerness came near tumbling into the water. He caught up the rod and gave a quick pull, and then the heavy pole was bent until the tip end touched the water. "He's a whale!" Bryce shouted. He kept the line taut, taking care lest the rod might break. For a time there was a hard, throbbing pull, and then the line became slack. Was he off? No; there he went, round and round, coming toward the surface. Suddenly, high out of the water he leaped, with mouth wide open. "Biggest bass I ever saw!" Bryce cried. Down he went, twenty, thirty feet, to the end of the line, and there he sulked. But it would not do to let him rest, and Bryce gave him a hard pull. Off he shot and in his fury threatened to break the rod, and reaching the limit of his tether, strove to snap the line. Was there ever so determined a fighter? A sudden slack and again he jumped clear of the stream. Down he came with a splash, and off he darted to the end of the line.

"He's gone!" the girl cried.

"No he isn't," Bryce replied; "but it will be a wonder if I get him out. Wish to the Lord I had a reel."

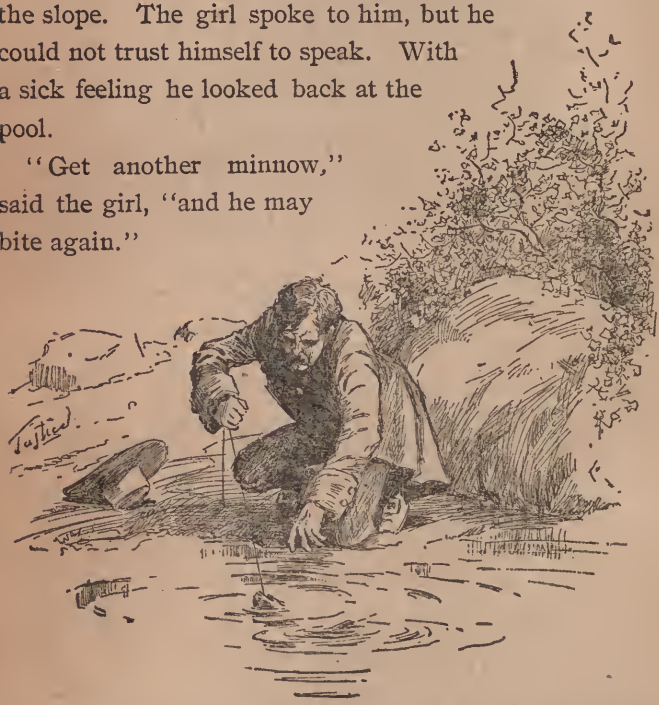
"But, Joseph, you must not talk like that even if you do want one. We shouldn't call on the Lord to aid us to catch a fish."

"I can't help it; I call on Him to help me catch this one. I do believe it's the biggest bass in the world. Now look at him!"

He was cutting scollops here and there. He shot down thirty feet. Bryce could feel him weaving, to get the purchase of his broad side against the water. Now he couldn't be moved. Harder and harder, as hard as he dared, Bryce pulled. Up he came with another jump, but this time not so high. And now Bryce slowly played him toward the shore. Closer, within a few feet of the shore, on the gravel where the water was shallow, his green side caught a ray from the sun. But a flounce, and again he was thirty feet below the surface of the pool. It all had to be gone over again. Now he was but a dead weight; he was tired out, almost drowned. Bryce slipped the rod back under his arm, and was taking in the line. The fish was on the gravel, with but a yard of line between him and his conqueror. Bryce was afraid to lift him clear of the water, and he reached down to slip a finger through his gills. He touched him. A flutter, a flounce, and he was gone. The hook lay on the gravel.

Bryce stood for a moment as though he were unable fully to realize the mishap. He took out his handkerchief, mopped his face, and without saying a word, walked up the slope. The girl spoke to him, but he could not trust himself to speak. With a sick feeling he looked back at the pool.

"Get another minnow," said the girl, "and he may bite again."



He'll do nothing of the sort. He's ten miles from here."

"But, Joseph; you are not angry at me about it, are you?"

"No, little girl," he answered, trying to smile. "But I would have given almost anything to get that fish. Biggest bass I ever saw. Well, get your basket, and let us go home."

"What! won't you fish some more?"

"Never as long as I live."

"Oh, you musn't say that. I am so sorry you lost him. Maybe there's another one just as big."

"There's not another one in the world that's just as big. Get your basket, and let's go."

CHAPTER IX.

Homeward they went, back through the dells and over the sharp cliffs—the girl bright, looking for happiness, the man inclined toward a moody silence.

"And did the losing of that fish really mean so much to you?" she asked.

"It meant everything and will continue to mean that much until I get over the disappointment. Of course, looking at it from the point of real value, the fish amounted to nothing, but the loss is sentimental and to me it is worse than losing a case in court."

"Losing a what?" she asked.

"A case in court, a mere figure of speech, used in the world. I wanted to hold that fish over Councilman Trent and make him squat."

"Oh, but you can tell him how large it was."

"Little girl, you are too innocent even to live in Bolga. He might smile and nod his head and declare that he believed me, but in his heart he would feel that I was a liar. When one saint goes to another and says, 'brother I saw a ghost,' the other saint may say, 'it is well;' but when one saint tells another about a bass, the other saint feels

the cold chill of suspicion creeping up his back. But there," he added, "we won't say anything more about it." He took her hand and led her along as though she were but a child. They found a young bird fluttering on the ground, and he climbed nearly to the top of a tall tree and put the fledgling back into the nest from which it had fallen.

"You are gentle and brave," she said when he reached the ground. "The angels smile when we are kind to a bird."

"A pretty sentiment spoken by a pretty mouth," he replied, brushing the bark off his coat. "And the birds —I suppose they frown when we are cruel to angels."

"Joseph, you can say such funny things. How can we be cruel to angels? I want to remind you of something before we get to the village."

"Can't you remind me of it now?"

"Yes, I could, but there is plenty of time. You will laugh at me when I do remind you of it. Won't you?"

"I think not."

"Yes you will, Joseph. You are laughing now."

"Well, but I will hush laughing when you remind me of the something."

"Oh, you are bidding for me to remind you now. Well, I will, and it is this: You remember what you said when we first sat down under that tree by the pool."

"About holding to me to keep from falling?"

"Oh, no. Is it possible that you forget a thing so soon? Don't you know that you said something about loving me more than you would the others, and that I said it would not be right?"

"Yes, I remember that."

"Well, I don't think it would be wrong. Now just look at you, laughing fit to kill yourself."

He put one arm about her, lifted her from the ground and kissed her.

Just after they had passed the rock where Bryce and Judith had sat, just before turning a leafy bend that would place them within sight of the village, they were startled by a loud yell and the rapid-firing of guns not far away. Bryce ran at the top of his speed, but Silvia kept well up with him. They saw Councilman Boyle running with a gun in his hand; they recognized the Father, calm and dignified in this tumult. When Bryce drew near he saw several men whose dress proved them to be strangers, and when he came to the edge of the crowd that had gathered, he asked a brother to tell him the cause of the commotion.

"I scarcely know," the brother answered. "The first we knew a strange man came running out of the woods with other men shooting at him. He ran into the weaving-room, and the pursuers want to go in after him, but

the Father is striving to protect him until he can find out why they want him."

The Father stood with his back against the door of the weaving-room, and near him Councilman Boyle stood with his gun.

"Joseph, you are back just in time," said the Father. "Stand you here beside me, and let us find out why this riot has been brought upon us."

A few yards away stood the four men who had done the shooting. They were rough and loud in their demand that the door should at once be opened.

"This man has been forced to take a refuge here," said the Father. "Why do you seek him?"

"Wa'al, I don't reckon you've got very much to do with that," the leader of the men answered. "It's enough for you to know that we want him."

"It is not enough for me to know that," the Father replied. "If you are officers of the law, and if this man has violated the law, then it will be enough, and the man shall be surrendered unto you; but we must know these things. Who are you?"

"I'm Tuck Benson, that's who I am; and I live about thirty mile from here."

"The distance of the place of your abode makes no difference," said the Father. "The question is: are you an officer of the law?"

"No, but I'm a man that attends to my own business; and this here feller come a foolin' round my business an' a tryin' to get me into trouble, an' me an' the boys here want him, an' we are goin' to git him. To tell you the whole truth he's up here fur the gover'ment, an' is atter us, so to speak. He says that we ain't got no right to raise co'n an' make whisky, an' we say we have. We fit fur the gover'ment durin' of the war, an' now the gover'ment wants to turn on us, an' we say help yo'se'f. That's all thar' is to it. This here feller come up some time ago, an' tuck my cousin Bob Ed Seviers off summers, an' he ain't got back yit. He come back atter us, this here feller did, several weeks ago, an' we come mighty nigh gittin' him, but he got out of a place whar' we had him hemmed up, but I don't 'low that he will git out of this here place whar' we've got him hemmed up."

And these were the men, this was the Tuck who had striven to kill Bryce at early morning when he had been aroused by what he thought was a panther, but what indeed was worse.

"Father," said Bryce, "let me say a word to that fellow."

"Proceed, Joseph."

"And you are Tuck Benson, are you?" Bryce asked.

"That's what they call me, an' that's what I don't deny"

"And you think that it is your right to kill men who seek to enforce the law."

"I think it's my right to kill men that try to enforce me."

"In other words you are a murderer in order to do an unlawful business. Now the best thing you can do is to go on away from here. If you don't you'll get hurt."

"Who'll hurt me?"

"I will!" Bryce reached over and took Councilman Boyle's gun.

"Now look here, boys," said Tuck Benson, lets argy this matter a little. You may stand here and protect this here feller, but he's got to come out some time and when he do, I've got him. He brought three fellers with him, and whur air they? He don't know, but we do."

"Joseph," said the Father, "this matter stands in need of compromise. We cannot give perpetual protection to this officer; we cannot make him one of us. Mr. Tuck Benson, you ought to know that you cannot subdue the entire government."

"That's true enough, but we can pop over men putty fast that come after us."

"Mr. Tuck Benson," said the Father, paying no attention to the fellow's last remark, "in this matter it is not our intention to take sides against you, for the fancied grievances of the world concern us but little; and at the

same time we cannot take sides against the government, for that would not be right. Now suppose this man will agree to go away and never to come back here again. Will that satisfy you?"

"But if he do agree to that he will come jest the same," Tuck Benson answered. "An' besides ef he don't come he will send somebody else. No, old man, we've got him penned up now, an' I reckon we better use him."

"But you cannot use him while he is in our house, and we cannot drag him out. Let me tell you and tell you quietly, that if you shoot him here, not one of you shall leave this place alive."

"Old man, I ain't got no call to doubt what you say," Tuck replied. "Well, now I tell you," he added after a moment of thought, "if he'll swear not to bother us or send any others to bother us for three months we'll let him off."

"Are you saying this merely to get a chance to shoot him when he is outside of the village, or do you mean it in good faith?" the Father asked.

"I mean it in good faith."

"But why do you stipulate three months?"

"Because we can git away from here by that time, and git fixed somewhar' else. They have made it too hot for us here."

"Well, now, remember that if you violate your pledge you gain our eternal enmity, and that will do you no good. Joseph, step inside and see if the man is willing to this arrangement."

Bryce opened the door far enough to look into the room and then drew back. He knew the man, a deputy-marshal named Allison, a tricky and indiscreet fellow. A mere sight of him argued and decided the case.

"Father," said Bryce, "you present the matter to him and I will stand guard."

"You have been told to present it," Councilman Boyle spoke up.

"It was not a command but a request," Bryce argued.

"But what objection can you have?" Boyle asked.

"Simply a feeling that I could not do it so well as the Father or yourself," Bryce replied.

"Let there be no dispute," said the Father; "I will see him."

The old man entered the room, and Bryce stood with his back against the door. But the deputy-marshal might upon coming out recognize him. The Father returned, and behind him came the deputy-marshal. Bryce dared not look around. "You may now go," said the Father; "and you, Mr. Tuck Benson, must remain here until he has been gone two hours. I will go to the stable with you," he added, speaking to the deputy-marshal, "and

saddle a horse for you. Ride him one hour and turn him loose. He will come home."

"Gentlemen," said the deputy-marshal, "I should like to shake hands with you all, and thank you for your kindness."

Bryce without looking around, replied: "That is not necessary; it is better that you depart at once." He leaned the gun against the door, taking care to keep his back turned toward the deputy, and slowly strode away. He went to a well, some distance off, drew a bucket of water, and holding the rim of the bucket to his lips, turned and looked back. The Father and the deputy were walking toward the stable. Councilman Boyle stood holding the gun as though the distillers were his prisoners. Bryce returned to the door of the weaving-room.

"I don't see why he wants us to stay here so long," said Tuck Benson. "We ain't goin' to pester the feller. Have dun said we wouldn't."

"Stand where you are!" Councilman Boyle commanded.

"Isn't it just as well to let them sit down?" Bryce asked.

"Let them stand where they are," the Councilman replied. And they stood there until the Father returned, but they grumbled the while, swearing that they were not

prisoners, that they had simply given their word that they would not leave until the expiration of a certain time.

"Let them walk about!" the Father commanded. "Joseph, keep time for them, and tell them when to go."

Councilman Boyle went away, the distillers stretched themselves on the grass, and Brycesat down with his back against a tree. And he mused over the narrowness of his escape. What if that fellow had caught sight of his face. What if he had cried out: "Why, hello Howard Bryce!" Now he realized that until his hair and beard should grow long he was to be beset with dangers. He wondered whether it were possible that the fellow had recognized him. Society might excuse him, might clap its hands at the recital of so audacious an adventure. But those sturdy men; what would they do? Again he mused over the folly of man's belief, the blindness with which he

accepts a creed. He sat there a long time. He arose and walked up and down the sward between the tree and the well; he looked at the clock in the weaving-room, and then turning to the distillers told them that it was time to go. They got up, stretching themselves. They told Bryce that as the government had not permitted them to sleep during the two preceding nights they were thankful for the lodging that he had given them. They took up their guns and strode away, and just then Silvia came running to Bryce to tell him that with her he was to eat supper at the Father's house.

There was but one street in the village, and it lay in a half circle to the left of the plaza. The Father's house was in this street, not far from the temple. There was nothing at the Father's board to distinguish it from any other table in Bolga. The ware was coarse and the food was simple. It was the first time that Bryce had noticed the Father's wife. She was a quiet little woman and moved about with noiseless step. At one time she must have been pretty, for Silvia had her features. How neat everything was. The oak floor was white; even the chairs had been scrubbed. Soon after supper Councilman Trent came in, and at once Bryce began to tell him about the bass, calling upon the girl to sustain him. The Councilman listened attentively and said that it must have been the one he hung there just after a June rise had run down,

five years before. "And if you had caught him," said the old man, "I warrant that you would have found my hook in his mouth. I mean if you had got him out, for of course you caught him. Yes, sir, that year there were some very large bass taken out of that hole. The Father doubtless remembers one that I brought home. It weighed nearly six pounds, if I remember rightly. Father, do you remember exactly how much it did weigh?"

The Father answered that at different times there had been a great number of fish brought to the village, but that he could not recall the number of pounds that any of them had weighed. Bryce thought that if Trent had been as skeptical about spiritual affairs as he was about fish he surely would have been an atheist instead of a Councilman of a credulous church.

The Father's wife brought three pipes, and under the influence of the tobacco the talk sobered. "It is a wonder to me," said Bryce, "that this village, having been so long established, does not contain more than four hundred souls."

"Not when you consider the fact that three times during our history we have been swept by epidemics, with cholera once, and twice with mountain fever. But it was not intended that our numbers should be great. A multitude could not keep a religion pure. The Saviour of mankind alone can expurgate sin from the crowd.

And that great day is not far off. Ah, Joseph, this village now so quiet and so remote, will then be the pulpit of the world. I look toward that day, and its brightness dazzles my old eyes; I listen, and my ears are filled with heavenly music. Pain and evil shall be no more. The heart of man shall be filled with love, and his soul shall be filled with the breath of God. Then, Joseph, should we not endure much to wait for the coming of that day? Should we complain of the ignorant man's laugh, the idler's jeer? God is with us, Joseph, with you and me and with us all."

Silvia sat beside Bryce with her hand lying in his, and the quiet housewife, the noiseless little woman was smiling upon them. The heart of this man smote him. He got up and looked about. He opened the door and gazed at the moonlight on the sward, at the black mountain far away. Silvia arose and came to him.

"Yes, it is time to go," said the Father. He put down his pipe, arose and approached them, in his great height towered above them, and placing one hand on Bryce's head and one on the head of his child, he said: "May God bless you, my children. Good night."

CHAPTER X.

At daylight a slow rain was falling, and with a sense of disappointment Bryce heard the dripping eaves. No stroll along the creek, no climbing of the mountain, but an indoor-listening to the dreary stories of Trent and to the bigotries of old man Boyle. Was this life, whose threshold he had scarcely crossed, beginning to pall upon him? Not yet, but he had begun to wonder how long could he keep up a show of respect for the mummeries of this absurd communion. The husband and the wives had eaten breakfast by the light of a lamp. Councilman Boyle had blown the horn, and it seemed that he had blown it earlier than usual; but in this he had followed the countryman's preposterous instinct—to get up soonest when there is least to do. Bryce stood in the outer door of the Prophet's house; in the center of the circular room the girls were gathered, gossiping, laughing, talking about gowns and a new dye-bark that had been brought from the woods. There was no promise of a break in the clouds. Across the landscape puffs of mist, like floating veils were blown; a muffled bird sat under

the gable of the weaving room; a rat ran from under the house to steal a drink of water.

"What do you find out here that is so interesting?"

He recognized the voice and he looked around with a smile. Alma stood beside him. "I have seen you every day," he said, "and have heard you laugh, and yet it seems that you have been away from me a long and dreary time."

"Not so loud," she warned him. "They might hear you. If it is long to you, what must it be to me? I have been compelled to see you—but they are listening. I do not dare to find fault with the religion which God has handed down to us, but I cannot but ask myself—I wouldn't dare ask the Father—why one wife would not have been better than five."

"Ah, and if you were that wife," he replied. "But it is sinful to question a plan that was drawn for us."

"I know it is," she said, "and I am sorry that I spoke of it. But it is so easy to say what we think; yes, and so hard to keep from saying it. Why, though, should we not have the thoughts that the Lord would like best to hear? He knows what we are going to think."

And with sophistic grace Bryce thus replied: "Thought may come as a temptation; to restrain it makes us virtuous."

"But why should God tempt his children with rebellious thoughts?" she rejoined.

"Alma, whence came the incentive to such a question?" he asked, looking straight at her. "Your father is a most rigid man, and your training must have been severe. Have you read books that you have hidden from him?"

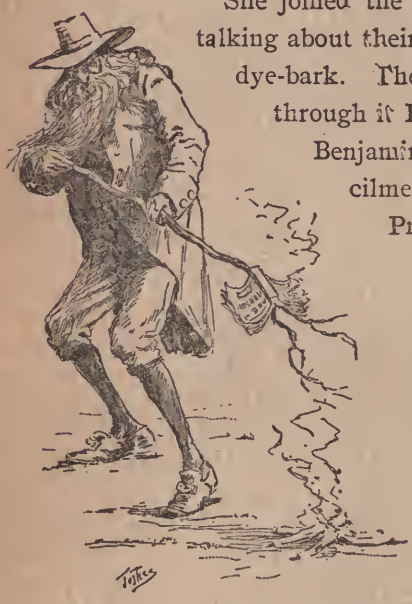
"He has seen all the books that I have read; and I will tell you about one of them. One time while the men were returning from Knoxville, whither they had gone to sell the linen, a ragged man asked them if he might ride a short distance in the wagon. They took him up and let him ride till their roads fell apart, and when he got out he left a book, a tattered thing without any covering. They thought nothing of it, did not look at it, might not have seen it; and I found it in the wagon after they came back. I was going to school at the time. Of course I was full of mischief, looking for a forbidden fruit, and so one night instead of studying my lesson I read that book. But I repented and the next morning I took it to Councilman Boyle, my father, and gave it to him; and that day at noon he burnt it in front of the temple."

"What was the name of the book?"

"The Age of Reason. Did you ever see it?"

"Yes, and all men who have seen it may be wiser, may worship nature with a deeper love, but they are not so religious. It is not right, though, to read such books."

"I ought not to have read a line of it," she said, "and I have tried to forget it, but sometimes it comes back to me. But I must go. Taking you to myself to-day is a piece of impudence on my part. You belong to Mary."



She joined the girls, who were still talking about their gowns and the new dye-bark. The rain fell faster, but through it Bryce saw the Father, Benjamin and several Councilmen coming toward the Prophet's house. At the door they threw off their gray shawls, stamped their feet and then bade Bryce good morning. Judith and Rachel sprang up from the hickory settee to let the Father and Councilman Boyle sit down; Mary brought a chair for Councilman Trent and Benjamin was permitted to shift for himself. Councilman Boyle's countenance was a reflex of the morning, dark and lowering, and Bryce fancied that the black, dripping dawn must have charged him with many a husky tenate of his

creed. But how sincere he was with his thin nostrils and whining voice; and how sincere was the early Puritan, the sour and merciless headsman of a harsh faith. Bryce hated him and he hated Bryce; it was the involuntary hatred that one extreme feels for the other. And yet this old man was proud to see his daughter a wife of the man he hated, for with savage ardor he believed that as a husband he was the fulfillment of a divine promise, and to criticise him was to advise with God.

"It is perhaps well enough," said Boyle, "to rest while it is raining, and still it is not well to idle away our time. We might strip the tobacco that hangs under the stable shed." He looked at Bryce as he said this, and Bryce, looking at him, replied: "By which you mean that it is better to work while you are resting."

"Work has its degrees, Joseph; idleness has not. We labor hard or easily, but when we are idle we do nothing."

"I don't know exactly what you mean, but I suppose your philosophy is all right."

"We are not guided by philosophy or what may pass for that shadowy quality, but by religion. And above all, life here is not a holiday."

"No," the Father spoke up, "and neither should it be a tread mill. To-morrow, Joseph, will be the Sabbath, and then we shall expect to hear from you in the Temple and we hope that the Lord may put benefitting word in your mouth."

"I am His instrument," Bryce replied, "and I hope that I may utter well the words which He may give unto me."

"And," the Father continued, "We shall also expect to hear from Councilman Boyle. He is a favored mouthpiece and his words do linger with us. Joseph, you said that years ago you thought to become a preacher but that in casting about you could not find the religion to suit you; and did you not during that casting about, hear the preaching of many a strange doctrine?"

"Yes, and some of them were too absurd to warrant attention. But some of them were entertaining. Do you know anything of what is termed the Christian faith?"

"I know something of it though I have never studied it," the Father answered. "Some of our fathers, away back, no one knows how long ago, came to us from the ranks of that faith, and I can remember hearing my grandfather discuss it. The faith was originally held by a mere handful of souls; they braved death, saw their master murdered, and then their faith spread itself over the world. The book of that religion is forbidden among us and we care naught for its teachings, but I remember hearing my grandfather say that the Christ delivered a beautiful sermon on a mountain, a discourse full of the words of peace and love, and yet men slew him. Ah, but at best the world is a murderer, and it will continue

to be a murderer until the real Saviour, with our blood in his veins and God's words in his mouth, shall step down from these mountains."

"Father, how old is our religion?" Bryce ventured to ask.

"As old, my son, as the will of God."

"But let me ask you what of the souls of the millions of men who have died. Where are they?"

"They are in God's keeping."

"But are they saved?"

"Nothing that God has in His keeping is lost."

"Millions of them are in hell," Boyle spoke up. "Nothing that God keeps is lost, but that which He does not keep is lost indeed. The souls of good men are asleep, awaiting the coming of our Saviour; the souls of bad men are in torment, where they shall remain forever."

"In some respects," said Bryce, "we do not materially differ from the Christians. Father, you said that as speech was given directly to man, it is man's duty to cultivate it. But is not all knowledge a gift from God, and is it not therefore right to cultivate it? Should we not go into the sciences instead of stopping at rhetoric?"

"Joseph, God spoke in words, and not in numbers. Therefore, words were given directly to us, and therefore are we to cultivate them."

"But let me ask you what language did God speak?"

"I know not, nor does that make any difference, for no matter what language it might have been it was composed of words."

"It does not behoove you to be skeptical," said Boyle. "You beyond all others should have most faith."

"Pardon me," Bryce replied, bowing. "I have asked questions, but I have felt no skepticism. I told you that I had much to learn; and it would not look well in me now to take the leadership."

"Joseph is right," said the Father.

"And am I always wrong?" Boyle asked.

"To say that Joseph is once right does not mean that you are always wrong," the Father replied. "Benjamin, how progresses your school? You are teaching this week, I believe."

"Yes, sir; and I think the school is doing well, not because I am teaching it, but because others have taught it. The scholars are anxious to have Joseph teach them."

"Ah, Joseph, and you must," said the Father. "I think it well that you begin the morning after the Sabbath."

Here was a pleasant task mapped out for him, and he replied with a smile, but the smile was not prompted from within. Years ago, when his father had been overtaken by business difficulties, Bryce had taught a school to enable him to complete his own education, and he des-

pised it — the droning of the children, the close air. And now he knew that if Councilman Boyle should discover his antipathy to the work he would be given an extra share of it. "To teach the young; to see a thought sprouting, and to train it, is a delightful occupation," he said.

Boyle looked sharply at him, and Bryce felt within his soul that the old man knew that he was a liar. "I am glad to know this," the Councilman said. "The teaching of a school is an art and we hope that you may make yourself acquainted with it. The teacher may not be the father of a thought held by the young but he is the guardian of it, and therefore his position is one of grave responsibility."

The Councilman pronounced these words as though he were a Moses, handing down a moral law, and he looked at Bryce as if he would estimate the strength of the hold his utterances had taken; he wanted this man to feel that his duties were graver than merely to talk idly with his wives, to tell them of his love, to smile at them, to pet them; he wanted him to understand that to discharge his duty he must permit the severity of his religion to sour every pleasure, and in this he was not so far away from the world as were those innocent girls and that huge old Father who sat there with the light of kindness in his eyes. Without rudeness Bryce withdrew from the Coun-

cilman's attention, and addressed himself to the Father and the Wives, and with those graceful qualities of bearing, of talk which enable a rascal to win admiration, he strove to entertain them. Nothing is shrewder than the art of dishonesty; nothing sings to innocence so sweet a song as the wanton when he seeks to be engaging.

There was no break in the clouds; mist-shapes continued to float in the air, and to this man who longed to be out, though his spirits seemed to be dancing, time was slowly dripped and drizzled away. The dinner horn was blown.

"Joseph," said Councilman Boyle, "you and Mary will take dinner with me to-day." How close a watch he kept even over the affairs of this household. Bryce and Mary went with him. He walked a short distance in front of them, with his eyes turned upward as if he were muttering a prayer in thankfulness for so dismal a day. Bryce caught Mary's glance and they smiled at each other. And this was the daughter of a girl who had run away and married a man of the world. Surely she possessed no spirit so adventurous as the spirit that had prompted her mother. Of all the Wives she was the shyest. Whenever he looked at her, she blushed; she blushed when he told her to sit beside him at the Councilman's table, and once when in leaning over he touched her, he fancied that she fluttered like a bird. The Councilman talked and Bryce nodded in approval of what he

said but heard him not. The Councilman's wife fanned herself with a turkey wing and spoke in praise of Alma, her daughter, and Bryce heard this, and he said: "She is a charming girl, one of the brightest that I have ever known, and her training reflects credit upon her parents."

This sent the Councilman off into a discussion of ethical child-culture and Bryce regretted that he had even agreed with the mother. Love was right, was natural, but it was not right to indulge a child. Children should not be permitted to have their own way, even when their way is harmless, for in too much freedom lie the seeds of rebellion. His daughter had not dared to disobey him. Bryce thought of the burning of The Age of Reason, pictured the scene in front of the temple, the gazing of the curious villagers, the stern aspect of the executioner; he thought of Alma, of her half-formed skepticism, of a keen intelligence which filial obedience kept covered from the view of her father.

Soon after dinner the visitors arose to go. Rain was falling fast. Bryce wrapped Mary in a shawl, and he fancied that she fluttered again when he touched her hair to arrange it on the outside of the covering. At home they found no visitors. Some of the girls were sitting about the center of the circular room; some of them were asleep

"Must I sit here by you?" Mary asked, pointing to the hickory settee.

"Yes, if you please."

Judith came out of her room, singing. "I thought I heard your voice," she said, speaking to Bryce.

"Your hearing must be wonderful, for I scarcely heard myself," he replied.

"Oh, it was because you didn't care to hear yourself," she rejoined, smiling at him. She drew up a stool and sat down near Bryce. "May I sit here, Mary?" she asked, and there was mischief in her eyes, a mischief not wholly innocent. There was a sweetness about her mouth, a half fierce sweetness, and there was a charm in her voice, but there was nothing spiritual in her quick eyes. There was a sort of purr in her manner; she was a picturesque animal.

"May I sit here?" Judith repeated, pretending not to have seen Mary's nodded "yes." "I mean just a little while."

"Of course you may, since you have as much right there as I have here."

"Oh, thank you; but you know that I haven't the right — that is, not to-day. How it rains; and, Joseph, you and Mary have had no chance to walk about at all," she rattled on. "But how charming a rainy day would be if it only kept near us those whom we want."

"Yes," Bryce spoke up, "a rainy day makes a companion dearer to us, just as a dark night makes our fire the brighter."

"Good, Joseph; but does it tune our ears for the words of wisdom? Have you enjoyed Councilman Boyle to-day more than usual?" This was said with so fine, so womanly an adroitness that in her manner Bryce could scarcely find a trace of mockery. "The Councilman is always entertaining," he answered, and he strove to appear serious, but she saw the hypocrisy underlying his words and laughed at it. "Rachel," she called, "come over here and get better acquainted with your husband."

"I can see and listen from here," Rachel replied.

"And shout what you have to say," Judith rejoined, laughing; and Bryce, looking at her, caught a sudden change in her manner — her face had been soft and pleasing, but now it was hard and dark. Bryce looked around and saw Alma approaching. Judith got up.

"Don't let me rob you of your seat," Alma said, halting.

"Oh, no robbery at all, I assure you. I was going any way."

"Not because I came, I hope?"

"Do you really hope so? It is kind of you."

"Oh," said Alma bowing, "perhaps it was but a thoughtless hope."

"An unconscious virtue, no doubt," Judith replied with a cold smile; and turning from Alma she thus spoke to Rachel: "Would you become better acquainted with Joseph? Then you must steal privileges that already belong to you."

"Come over and sit with us, Rachel," Alma called. "You give us the opportunity to add modesty to our group."

Mary was nervously twisting a string that she had pulled out of the covering of the settee, and without looking up she remarked: "Why should there be such talk as this? One might not expect real sisters to live together in perfect harmony, but we should expect the Wives of the Prophet to be respectful toward one another. Rachel knows that she has a perfect right to sit here: we all know that our rights are equal; then why should there be such talk as we have just heard? Joseph, it is your duty to put a stop to it."

No one had expected this from Mary, and every one looked in surprise at her. Bryce felt that he was called upon to say something, but what should he say? To take sides would be to stir up strife; to say nothing were a silent judgment rendered against Mary. Judith stood a short distance away looking at him; Alma's eyes were turned toward him. "Children," he said, laughing, "let me tell you a story."

"Oh, do," they cried. And he told them a story, something that he had read; and they laughed at it, so humorous a life did it unfold to them, and when the recital came to an end they shouted for more. Now, in good humor, they were sitting about him, expectant, eager as children. He told them of a play he had seen, and as best he could he described the dazzling gowns worn by that wonderful creature, the leading lady; and they clapped their hands and pleaded for another one just like it. Then he told them a distressing love story, and they put their arms about one another and sobbed aloud in sympathy for the beautiful girl whom a heartless father had locked up, but they tittered in tearful gladness when the hero broke into the strong room, seized her in his arms and triumphantly bore her away. They were like the patrons of an early English play; there were no absurdities, nothing was trite; there was no questioning, no criticism, but in the sweep of a new imagination all things were true and vivid.

At supper they hastened through with the meal, hoping that no one, not even the Father, might visit them that evening; and when they had returned to the Prophet's house, they gathered about the story teller and begged him to tell on. "Now everybody hush," one or the other of them would say. "Hush, now, everybody; he's going to begin." He went into the Arabian Nights, frightened them with Blue Beard and was charming them

with Cinderella when a knock come at the outer door. "Joseph," called the voice of Councilman Boyle, "it is time that you all were in bed."

CHAPTER XI.

The next morning was as fresh as though the world in its perfection of green and purple had at the word of the Creator first sprung into light. Under the down-pour of the sun, sheets of water that lay on the level about the village, threw a dazzle on the air.

At an early hour Bryce heard the cry: "Prepare ye, for the day of worship is come," and he wondered if the entire day were to be given over to the wearisome mummeries of old man Boyle's religion. Bryce was as well acquainted with the creed as he cared to be; he had grown tired of it; turn it whichever way he might it presented nothing new—the novelty was dead.

There was no cheerful talk at breakfast. Councilman Boyle was with the Wives and the Prophet, to remind them that it was no time for idle words; he sighed and he groaned.

To the temple Bryce walked with Rachel, the other Wives following close, solemn, with heads bowed. There was not a sound in the village. Every foot-step was noiseless, the laughter of the children was hushed. There were no seats in the temple. Slowly the people filed in

and took their places. It was the first time that Bryce had seen so many of the people in a body, and he looked with interest upon them. They did not stare at him; there was no whispering when he entered the place of worship. The Father and the Councilmen stood about the altar, and upon seeing Bryce, they stretched forth their hands toward him, and as he approached they made way for him to stand in the midst of them.

"It is now your duty to preach to the chosen of the Lord," the Father said, and Bryce bowed in obedience. In front of the altar was a low platform, and the Father motioned him to stand upon it. Bryce obeyed, and slowly he began to address them. He was accustomed to public speaking; he had won a prize for oratory. He began with the beauty of the morning: it was the smile of God.

He spoke of the light in the eyes about him; it was the love of God. He recalled his rhetoric; he remembered the words of a prize essay and applied them with great effect. He took up the creed and made it appear a glorious instrument handed down from heaven. The people were entranced. He drew a picture of the day when the Saviour of mankind should stand on the top of the east mountain—back of Him the rising sun, in front of Him the astonished world, about Him the people who had waited so long for His coming. A loud shout arose, and ere he knew it, the Father held him in his arms. Councilman Boyle stood there with tears streaming down his face. "God bless you, Joseph," the Father cried, "you have thrilled my old heart with blazing words." The Father released Bryce and then Councilman Boyle put his arms about him. "I was going to preach to-day," said he, "but, Joseph, I will not attempt to follow you. You may be idle when you sit about your house or walk about the village, but when you stand here you are inspired."

Slowly they filed out. How full of affection were the eyes that looked upon the orator; old men and old women came forward to grasp his hand. And what effect had this upon him? What was he thinking about? He was wondering if they were going to have dinner at the regular time or wait through pinching hours and at evening

bolt a snack. The Father, the four Councilmen and several women went home with him. Rachel sat beside him. "I wish they would go away," she whispered. "We want you to tell us a story. But I know they won't. But we have had enough religion for to-day. I could listen to you, though, ever so long. How different from what we have ever heard before."

"I didn't eat very much breakfast," Bryce replied, speaking low, "and the information that we are soon to eat something would thrill me mightily. Are you hungry, Rachel?"

"Famished," she whispered.

They heard Councilman Boyle clear his throat. "My brothers and sisters," said he, "I had intended to speak a few words to-day, but under the great light held aloft by Joseph, I felt that my feeble candle could but cast a shadow. But I am willing now to give you the words which I thought that I had been inspired to utter."

Bryce groaned inwardly, and the girls looked troubled, but no one spoke. "I will deliver my few words," the Councilman went on, "and then we will eat something, for it is well that the body should be sustained.

This was encouraging, especially if his words were to be but few. He began a discourse on the creed, and the Father sat with his head bowed. His religion was so old that he knew not the name of the man who had first

received it, but the time was near the creation of the world, and the world must have been created a thousand years ago. Here and there he introduced a suggestion of biblical history. There had been a strong man, and with a club he had put ten thousand of his enemies to death; there had been a flood, and all of the inhabitants of the earth, save forty, had perished. He uttered one sentence that struck Bryce, and it was this: "In conclusion I will simply add one more word." But why had he gone out of his way to speak of adding one more word when indeed he was adding fifty? A woman came in and stood at the back of the Father's chair. The horn was not blown on the Sabbath, and she had come to tell them that dinner was ready. At last the discourse was ended. "Joseph," said the Councilman, "it is not expected that I should wave a torch as you do, but my light, though small, is a safe one to follow. Father, let us eat with Joseph."

At the table the Father took the lead. Bryce fancied that having heard so much from Councilman Boyle he was determined to talk in self-protection. "Joseph," said the Father, "it has begun to seem that you have always lived among us, but in truth you have not been with us quite a week. We have all been happier since you came, expecting something from you, and that sermon to-day proved that we did not look to you in vain.

But mark me, we do not expect this of you every Sabbath. Inspiration is not of constant flame; the fire dies down, and the coals are covered with ashes, and it blazes not until more fuel is brought. Blow not the coals; wait until the fuel doth come."

"You told me that I was expected to speak," Bryce replied, "and yet when you led me to the platform I knew not what I was going to say. Indeed, after I began, I knew not what I was saying, and it was not until you had seized me in your arms did I know that my words had been well spoken. When I entered the temple my brow was hot, and I felt a strange heaviness, and my relief came with the pouring out of that current of words."

"Joseph," said the Father, reaching over and placing his hand on Bryce's shoulder, "I compared your discourse to fire, you compare it to water, and the comparisons are well drawn since your words warmed my heart as with a fire and cooled your brow as with water. There have been many powerful discourses delivered in that Temple. I will tell you of one. It was when I was a young man, devout in the cause, it is true, but without the thought of ever becoming the Father. One Sabbath it was known that Councilman Brad, one of the oldest men among the chosen of the Lord, was to preach. It was a summer's day and was cloudless after a season of

rain. The old man stood upon the spot where you stood to-day, and his words, too, came like a swift current. Ah, it seemed that a mountain dam had broken; the flood came with a roar. I stood near him, and in my strong imagination, I could see trees borne upon the tide. The flood ceased, the tide had run down. The old man held up his hands. The Father who stood near caught him in his arms and eased him down. He was dead. That man was my father."

A long silence followed. "Father," said Bryce, when he felt that he could speak without apparent rudeness, "there is something that I desire to ask you. Did the soldiers of either army bring trouble upon you during the war?"

"We were not wholly free from annoyance, Joseph. The country here about was divided. Some looked toward the North and others toward the South. A draft was issued by the South and soldiers came to force our men into the army. We told them that we cared not for the petty disputes that brought about a war on this earth; told them to put down their guns and wait for the Saviour of mankind. They laughed at us; they called us crazy, but they said that crazy men could shoot. And they took a number of our young men away with them. But we knew that they would soon return if they should get an opportunity. And they did come back, nearly every one

of them, within two weeks. Soon after this the Northern soldiers came, and learning that we had taken no part in bringing about the war, that some of us had been drafted but had deserted, they decided that we must be in favor of the Union and they therefore extended us an urgent invitation to join them. But we told them as we had told the others, that we cared nothing for the world and her troubles, whereupon they called us lunatics and then helped themselves to our fodder and corn. I was not the Father at that time, but I went to see General Rosecrantz. He received me kindly. I told him that his men had robbed us of our corn and fodder; and at this he smiled. He said that his army needed corn and fodder. I asked him if it were expected that the chosen people of God should furnish him with whatever he needed. He smiled and said that he was inclined to believe that the chosen people of God were in his army. But I pleaded with him until he promised me that he would issue an order for our protection, and he must have done so for we were troubled no more."

The afternoon was far advanced when they arose from the table. Bryce contemplated with a shudder the likelihood of returning to his house, and therein to sit and listen to Councilman Boyle, and he asked the Father if his walking abroad would be in ill keeping with the solemnity of the day, whereupon the old man answered

that to walk was as worshipful as to sit, that it was the heart and not the attitude that praised the Lord. This decision cast a look of disappointment upon the face of Councilman Boyle; he had thought to make the rest of the day gloomy with another discourse. And the girls too were disappointed, for they had hoped to hear another story. Bryce requested Rachel to go with him to the west mountain to see the sun set. "We shall not be gone long," he took occasion to whisper to Alma, "and when we return I will tell you a story." She smiled upon him and replied: "I hope that the sun will not lag, but fall down as soon as you get to the top of the mountain."

The distance was not great and the way was not rough. Bryce wondered what characteristic was to be discovered in Rachel; whether she had the jealousy of Judith, the shyness of Mary, the frankness of Silvia, or the cutting intelligence of Alma. "I don't think that your brother Benjamin likes me very much," he said as they walked along. He expected to see her show surprise, and to hear her protest against so unreasonable a supposition; but she did neither; she simply remarked: "Benjamin does not always speak his mind, but he cannot always hide it."

"Oh! then you know that he does not like me?"

"Benjamin believes in our faith; he is a student, and may one day be the Father of the chosen, but he is a human being. We are all human beings."

"Ah! And by which you mean that in obeying a command I have robbed him."

She looked at him. "Then, if he does not like you, the reason is not covered up. Did some one tell you that he was to marry Alma?"

"I know not whether some one told me, or whether I divined it."

"It was easy enough to tell, and easy enough to divine," she replied. "But let us change the subject. Joseph, you tell love stories so well that when you were in the world you must have been in love."

"No, I was never in love until I came to Bolga."

"But you tell of beautiful women, dressed in silk and flashing with diamonds. And is it not natural that we should love the beautiful?"

"Yes, if the beautiful be good, but the beautiful is not always good."

"But, Joseph, no one in the world is good, and you being then in the world should have loved the beautiful of the world with no thought of the good."

"Where did you get your philosophy, Rachel? You girls are constantly springing something upon me to make me think. You all possess a shrewdness that I can't understand. I must go to your school and study the source of your argument. The Father has told me that in our academy the use of words is a

feature, but the mere conning of words does not bring thought."

"And still, without words we could not think," she replied.

"Yes, that is true, and with words alone we cannot think."

"But you must know, Joseph, that our education does not consist wholly of words. We read books."

"But what sort of books? Harmless books, books that tell you but little of the world, of the thoughts that engage men."

"Oh, then, books to be productive of thought must be harmful, must they?"

"I don't mean that. I mean, though, that they must contain much that is objectionable to our religion. I can say this, however: Your school in a surprising degree teaches the art of expression. Either of you girls would be a sort of an astonishment in a drawing room of the world."

"You pay us a compliment. Come over this way. There is a rocky place over there that is hard to climb. Look back. Is not that a peaceful view?"

"Yes," he answered, "it lies under a holy benediction. But let us hasten to the top. The sun will be gone before we get there."

"But here is the top," she said. "Don't you see the slant begins there on the other side. You didn't expect

to find a peak so sharp, did you? Now let us sit here on this rock. Look at the sun almost under your feet. Now look over at the village. It is almost dark there while on the other side of us we have the light of the universe. Could there be anything more beautiful?"

"It is far beyond beauty," he answered; "it is glory. Never before have I seen the light and the darkness of the world brought into so sharp a contrast. God, I wish I were this mountain, forever to remain here, gazing at the sun rise and at the sun set, wrapping the night about me and throwing off the cloak at dawn."

Far away to the right and to the left there were higher mountains, but in front of them was one continuous slope into the fire-flood of the sun. Far down below a buzzard sailed across their view; one moment a bird of gold, the next a vulture, black. What was that change? A purple shadow, creeping up the mountain side. And with this came the scream of a hawk and past them whirred a quail. The shadow sobered to a pinkish blue, and now the pink was gone—the blue was deepening into black.

"It is time we were going," she said. "We were not to stay long, you remember,"

"I know," he replied, "but I could sit here always with you."

"Why with me?"

"Because I love you."

Was she laughing at him? He thought so, and he asked: "Is it strange that I should love you?"

"It is not strange that you should respect me but you do not know me well enough to love me, that is, beyond that degree of affection which you are commanded to bestow."

"And do you love me, Rachel, out of an obedience to command?"

"Yes, I am a Wife of the Prophet."

"And does your love stop abruptly there?"

"It goes no further but stops not abruptly. I shall fight against giving you a purely human love. To love you thus might make me miserable."

"But should it meet with a love just as human and just as deep. What then?"

"Joseph, I dare not think about it. You are possessed of the qualities that I should select for my natural husband. You worship nature and so do I. Your face was heavenly in the dying light; I thought that I saw the yearning of a great and noble soul, and that moment I wished that you might love me, forgetting all others, but the next moment I killed that selfish thought. You must not tell me that you love me better than you do the others. It will make me doubt your sincerity and then I could not even respect you. No, Joseph, you must think of me as you do the rest. Come, we must go now."

She had surprised him; her character was a revelation. Was she the deepest thinker of them all? Had she begged him without argument to love her, he would have told her that he worshipped her and would have thought but little of it, but now she had incited him to win her. As they were going down the slope he put his arm about her, and she gently removed it. He asked her if he had not the right to caress her, and she laughingly answered: "Not when your caresses might cause me to stumble and fall."

They passed under the lantern that hung over the village well; they stood in the shadow that lay about the door of the Prophet's house.

"Rachel, one kiss."

"Inside, in the light," she replied, laughing.

"No, here angel, where no one can see."

"Would you have me think less of myself?"

"No, but more of me. Quick, some one is coming to open the door."

She thrust her hand into his. He drew her to him, held her in his arms, kissed her. Her bonnett fell off. He stooped to get it, a light fell upon the ground, and when he looked up she had fled from him.

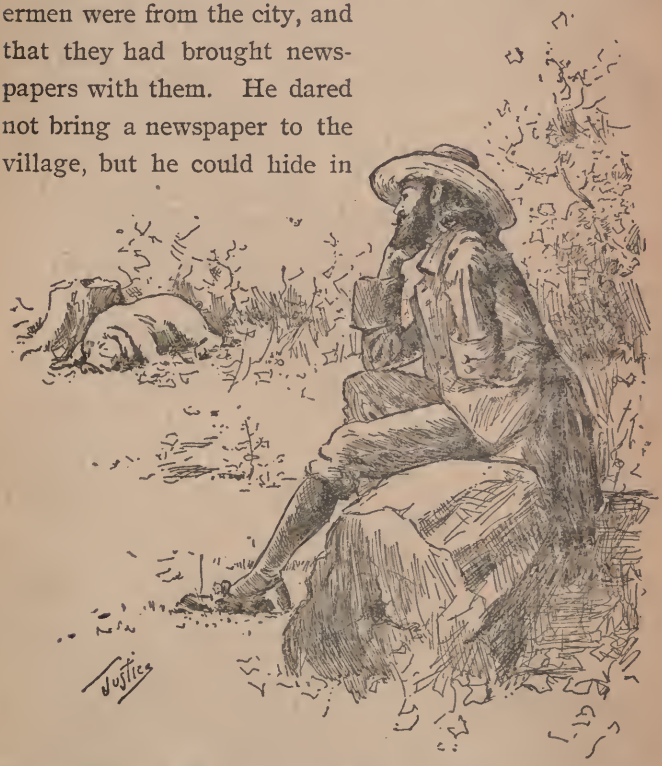
CHAPTER XII.

Nearly four months had passed; the weather was growing cooler; the men were gathering the flax. During the days when the heat was fierce Bryce had preferred to teach the school, and so marked an aptitude had he shown that the Father and the Council decided to let him continue with this work. But now that the days were cooler he longed to be out. He watched the men who had been detailed to gather the corn, and he thought that he would like to ride on the wagon. Often he dozed in his chair, and sometimes he was so nervous that he could scarcely sit still. He had expended his rhetorical force, and preaching was a dead drag to him. He was tired of hearing Boyle talk, tired of having anyone eat at the table with him, tired of everything. The creek no longer was musical; the scenery was old, the west mountain was an unsightly hill. His wives were peevish, sometimes tearful, sometimes angry. Their jealousies were keen of edge; they hated one another. He had amused himself with striving to win Rachel's love; he had told her a thousand lies and had won her love, and now his strife lay in his efforts to keep down an outbreak.

She had told him that she would pull Judith's hair and scratch Alma's face; she had sworn to scald Silvia, to break modest Mary's head with a broom handle. She had spitefully said to him: "You wanted a human love; now what are you going to do with it?" But she was no worse than Alma and Judith. Once he heard Alma say: "Who, Judith! Oh, we don't speak now." Sometimes, though, they would all make up and have a love feast. Rachel and Judith would walk arm in arm, but how they did hate each other. Throughout the village it was thought that life in the Prophet's house was as perfect as divine guidance could make it. The girls were too proud to carry their resentments to the dining-table, and too religious to take them to the temple. There were times when Bryce had so strongly felt that he must be alone that he had dismissed the school, and sneaked off into the woods. Once he remained there in the rain, although the day was cool, feeling that a chill was preferable to the drowsiness of the school-room or the bickerings of the Prophet's house. He saw a hog sleeping alone in the wet leaves and envied him.

The sight of those musty old books sickened him. He longed for a novel of to-day and, above all, for a newspaper. The vilest or the dullest sheet ever printed would have been a delight to him. He was sitting in the school-room thinking of all this when he heard some one say that a

party of men were fishing at the Witch Hole. He was not now afraid of discovery; a dark beard almost covered his face, and his hair was long. It was likely that the fishermen were from the city, and that they had brought newspapers with them. He dared not bring a newspaper to the village, but he could hide in



the woods and stuff himself with the news of the world. And how dear had the wretched old world become to him. He dismissed the school. He would now sneak away.

He set out for the nearest point of the woods. He passed near the well. Someone spoke to him. He looked around and Alma stood under the tree where he had sat watching the illicit distillers. "Whither are you going, Joseph?"

"I am simply walking."

"Let me walk with you."

"But that will make Judith angry. You know that I belong to her to-day." He was beginning to hate that belonging to any one, that daily transfer as though he were a chattel.

"Oh, you are always thinking about her."

"No, but I am always thinking of keeping down a disturbance."

"You don't love me as you did, Joseph."

"Nonsense! you know I do. The truth is Alma, I am not well and I want to be alone."

"But if you love me why should you want to be alone? I don't want to be alone when I could be with you."

"There, now, somebody might hear you. You know that I love you better than I do any one, and if you love me you will do as I beg of you. Go to the house and don't tell any one that I am not at the school."

He walked on and she did not follow him. He chose the rough way to the Witch Hole because it was the nearer. He rested on the top of a high knob, looked back

at the village and muttered: "I wish that place could be blotted out." He got up to pursue his course but he was still tired and he sat down again. The air was cool but there was no refreshment in it; the sun was genial but languor was in its rays. The tints of all seasons was mixed in the woods, gorgeous tapestries were spread upon the tree-tops, rich, flame-colored rugs were hung upon the sumac bushes, but their beauty thrilled him not. A mountain cow rang her bell, and quickly he looked toward her; it was a reminder of a street car. Down the slope he went; once he slipped and grabbed a bush and cried out with pain—a thorn bush. At the base of the knob was a spring, and on the moss and dying ferns he stretched himself to drink, and there upon his breast he lay, watching the minnows. Suddenly the memory of an old song—"Just Twenty Years Ago"—was flashed upon his mind; he had caught sight of a gray hair in his beard.

He found no fishermen at the Witch Hole. He stood upon the shore and looked at the dead leaves slowly floating down, and he fancied that he saw a shudder, a cold chill, running up and down the creek. He thought that he heard voices, and stepping nearer to the water and looking up the stream, he saw a party of men. They were standing on a rock fishing where the current, meeting the opposing back water from the river, whirled round and round. On the hillside a short distance away, a fire

was burning, and hovering over it was a man frying fish. As Bryce approached the men he heard them making remarks upon the comical peculiarity of his appearance; one of them said that he would like to catch so odd a fish. Bryce spoke to them and asked them if they had met with good luck. They had caught a few bass, enough to eat, but not enough to pay them for their long journey. They asked Bryce if he did not belong to that strange village. He answered that he lived in a village not far from there, but that it was not strange in the sight of the Lord. "That may be," one of them replied, "but it is strange to us; and we have decided to break camp to-day and go over there to take a look at the place." Bryce asked him if he had a newspaper, and he answered by saying that the cook might have one. Bryce went up the slope to the place where the fire was burning. The cook said that he had a paper with some bacon wrapped in it. "But you may have it," he added; and just as he turned to go after it, Bryce caught a glimpse of an India ink star on the back of his hand. He was the waiter who had told him of the old sailor. And he was going through the village and the people would see that star and wonder at it, and ask about it. He would tell them that a man had picked it there and then what would they think? Benjamin would ask to see the pictures on his arms. The chosen people had stood in awe of those images drawn by

the lightning, and had never viewed them critically. The girls had looked at them, wondered over them, but Benjamin had glanced at them but once. Should he tell those men that strangers were not permitted inside the village? Just then he heard one of them say: "Baxter says that they treated him kindly but wouldn't tell them anything about themselves." The cook came with the greasy newspaper and gave it to Bryce. The star appeared to have grown brighter. One of the men shouted and threw a small bass up the slope. The cook caught it and holding it on a flat stone near the fire began to scale it.

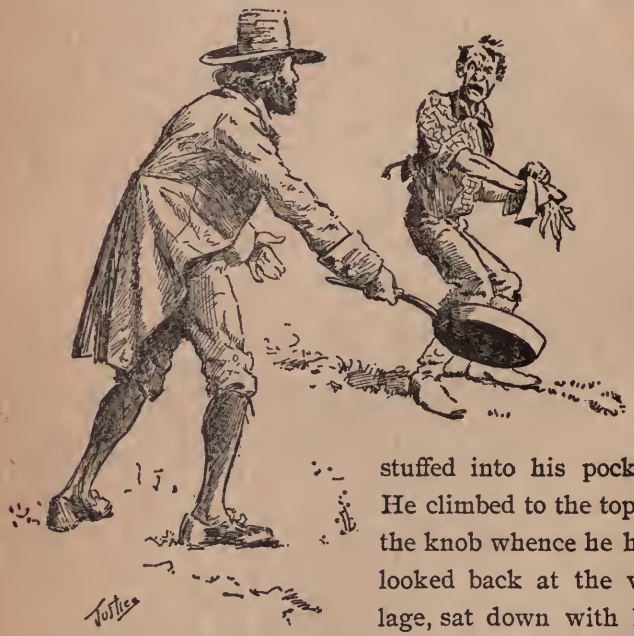
"Those fish are not frying fast enough," said Bryce, pointing to the pan.

"They are dancing in the grease; don't see how they could fry any faster."

"I will show you how," Bryce replied. "You don't want a blaze but a bed of coals. I will fix it for you."

He took up the pan of bubbling grease, moved round nearer to the cook, stumbled—overturned the grease on the fellow's hand. The men below were startled by a loud cry and a fury of oaths. Bryce stood there, bowing, wringing his hands, making apologies. He would not have done it for the world. He would make every possible reparation, he would do the cooking. He knew that for his awkwardness he deserved to be thrown into the creek and he would not protest against it. It must have

hurt mightily. "Hurt," the fellow cried, "the skin's all peeling off the back of my hand.". "Go down and hold it in the creek!" one of the men cried. He followed this advice, and Bryce muttering more apologies, sauntered away. He had forgotten his newspaper but it was safe,



stuffed into his pocket. He climbed to the top of the knob whence he had looked back at the village, sat down with his back against a rock and spread out the soiled sheet. The paper had been printed in Nashville and was more than a week old, but that made no difference; it was fresh in comparison with Bryce's knowledge of the world. The

first thing his glance fell upon was an undertaker's advertisement, the picture of a hearse. The name of the advertiser was familiar to him and he read it over and over again. Then he looked at another advertisement; he was holding back the feast of news. Now came the news. A state treasurer had gone wrong; the governor was criticised for a too free use of the pardoning power; a rousing political meeting in the fourth ward; a religious fanatic had slain his own child; man calling himself Christ was arrested for preaching on the public square; another preacher gone wrong; irate husband had threatened to kill a Congressman; married man had run away with a sixteen-year-old girl; war cloud in Europe; a bright American woman had refused an introduction to the Prince of Wales; dens of vice exposed by a New York preacher; New Jersey preacher arrested for bigamy; famous actor stricken with paresis. And what was this? The Rev. J. Hartley had been called by the largest congregation in Tennessee.

The sun was going down. Bryce dared not take the newspaper home with him; he thrust it under a rock and hastened to the village. Judith met him. She told him that several strange men had just passed through the village, and that they had asked all sorts of questions.

"But why didn't you let me know that you were going for a walk?" she asked.

"I didn't think I was going very far."

"But what difference did that make?"

"Oh, I don't know that it made any particular difference. The truth is I wanted to be alone. I am sick and tired."

"But you are not sick and tired of me, are you?"

"Of course not. Now I hope that you are not going to take up that foolish notion that I don't love you."

"But if you love me why should you want to slip off from me?"

"There you go; same thing over and over, day after day. You girls are old enough to act like women."

"But don't we act like women?"

"Yes, that's a fact. You do act like women, and I wish you wouldn't."

"Joseph, I declare I don't understand you. One moment you say that you want us to act like women, and the next moment you acknowledge that we do act that way and that you are sorry for it. But I want you to speak to Rachel, that's what I want you to do."

"What has she been doing?"

"Called me a good-for-nothing thing."

"And what had you called her?"

"Hadn't opened my mouth; I declare I hadn't. Silvia and I were sitting in the door and she came by and made a mouth at me, and the ugliest mouth she could possibly make, too. And I simply told her that it improved her

appearance, and then she called me a good-for-nothing thing. I said that I was going to tell you, and she cried yah! yah! yah! right in my face."

"And that was dreadful, wasn't it?"

"Oh, well, Joseph, if you want to take sides against me you can. But I didn't think it of you."

"For gracious sake, don't cry right here where the Father or any of the Councilmen might see you."

"I'm not crying and I want you to understand that I am not, too. I just don't want to be imposed on and if I tell you about it you say I am crying. But it makes me so mad that I can hardly see. If you don't love me tell me so and I will quit your house. There are plenty of other places I can go, goodness knows."

Supper was waiting; the Father had just sat down. "Joseph," said the old man, "several strangers appeared in the midst of us something like an hour ago, and I looked about for you but found you not. But they remained a short time only, for they were idle and asked questions that beseemed them, and we told them to go their way. One of them carried his hand in a sling and I asked him why, whereupon he replied that it had been burnt with hot grease. And then I told him that unless he quitted his idle prowling the burning which he might get in the future would be something hotter ten times over than any grease he had felt. They were disposed to laugh

at us, and I reminded them that oaken plants were plentiful, whereupon they took the hint and straightway left us."

"I was over at the Witch Hole," Bryce replied, "and saw the fellow when he burnt his hand. He made great sport of my dress and was singing a bawdy song when the grease in a blazing shower flew out of a pan and fell upon him."

"Indeed!" the old man cried. "A lesson in fire visited upon the graceless rascal. Councilman Boyle must hear of this; it will do him good. Ah, and a strong text it will make for you the next Sabbath. It will be the day after to-morrow, and I will tell the brethren that you are to speak upon a thrilling theme. It is well that you were in the way at the time, for if it were a lesson to the rascal, it were also an illustration to be drawn upon."

"I shall do the best I can, Father, or rather the best that the Lord permits me to do, but of late the coals have had ashes upon them and no fresh fuel has been brought. You told me not to blow the coals."

"True, Joseph, but let us pray for more fuel, and if our prayers be uttered with faith, the fuel will come."

"But, Father, should we not wait for inspiration in its own good time?"

"Joseph, we are told to pray for grace, and inspiration is a grace."

There was no way out of it. He was to prod his brain, jolt his jaded memory to fake another sermon. He hated the sight of the temple, despised his own voice arising in the rant of pretended fervor. Supper was over, and he said that he was going out to commune, to pray for inspiration. Judith asked if she might go with him, and the Father commanded her to go to the house and wait for her husband's return. Bryce strolled toward the creek. He passed the rock whereon he and Judith had sat; he hated the sight of it. He went to the hollow rock where the water poured with notes ever changing but always deep. The roar remained but the music was gone. He wondered if he were going insane. What was that crawling through his mind? "A famous actor stricken with paresis." A sudden resolution came to him, and he felt stronger, his mind grew clearer—he would run away. He sat down and thought deeply. He felt that Benjamin was keeping a close watch over him. If he should attempt to run away and fail, the chosen people would kill him. At one moment he might be the God-appointed husband of the Wives; at the next moment they could look upon him as a traitor deserving of death. They would seek to follow him, but how far? They would know not which direction to take; they would not think of going to Nashville, so far away. To go farther would be better, but he had not money enough. With him he had not a penny,

and at home he had but little. His law books were valuable, but at a forced sale they would not bring more than half their worth. But a new sadness crept into his heart — the thought of leaving Alma. Away from the others he felt that he could be happy with her. About her there was a brightness, a softness that was ever pleasing to him. But suppose he should grow weary even of her? He could send her home. What! was he really thinking of taking her with him? It would not do to take her to the city; that would be a scandal. But he could leave her somewhere until he could dispose of his books and other small interests; then he could take her to some village, far away, and there live happily with her. He knew that she would go with him; she had told him that to live alone with him would be an endless bliss. But he must wait a few days until he could be alone with her. He thought of Judith at the house, waiting for him. "Tigress!" he muttered. Darkness had fallen, the stars were out; it was time for him to return but still he sat there. He loathed the memory of Judith's arms, yet round and soft were they. He thought of the time when his lust was strong, when his blood leaped high to the touch of a kiss, and he sighed like an old man nearing decay, for his blood was cool, his passion—cinders.

The village dogs were barking. Bryce passed the Father's house and heard him at his evening prayer,

heard the words: "And O grant that Joseph may pour out thy holy words and thrill each waiting heart." He stopped at the well to get a drink, but he turned loose the windlass as soon as he had touched it; he was afraid that its creak might call Judith to the door. Silently he entered the house, stealthily he made his way to the room in which he had sat the first night, waiting for the Father to return. Here he stretched himself upon the floor. The air was cool and he had no covering, but he had solitude, and that was a blessing. He had primed himself with a lie—he would tell Judith that he had fainted. A light burned in her room; the other rooms were dark. He lay there drawing a plan of escape. He remembered that the Father had told the revenue officer to take a horse, ride him and turn him loose, that he would come back. Two horses could return as well as one. Alma could ride a horse; he had heard her say that she could. They would ride to a point far down the river and then take some sort of a boat. He heard a door open. He peeped out and saw Judith going toward the front door. She stood there, looking out. Bryce felt the cold air that rushed past her, that fluttered her night dress. "Joseph!" she called, and Bryce sprang to his feet. "Here, Judith. For gracious sake don't cry out that way; you'll alarm the whole village."

She wheeled about and rapidly came toward him.

Bryce advanced to meet her. They halted under the hanging lamp. She was pale and her lips were so tightly drawn that they looked thin. "What were you doing in there, Joseph?"

"I hardly know. I went into that room to get something and must have fainted."

Her eyes snapped. "Did you ever faint when Alma was waiting for you?" She laughed; it was almost a shriek.

"You are coming to me with more of your petulant nonsense," he replied.

"Am I?" she cried. She was crumpling a piece of paper in her hand. "Listen to this!" she commanded, smoothing out the paper.

"What is it?" he asked, moving toward her as if he would snatch the paper. "No you don't, Joseph." She drew back; she was spitting at him like a cat. "Listen, I will read it to you." And then in contempt and bitterness she read these lines:

TO ALMA.

Thy kiss is sweeter than the honeyed wax
That clings to thighs of clover-robbing bees;
Thy breath is purer than the gentle air
That stirs the poplar bloom at eventide.
Thy voice, oh Alma, daughter of the sun,
Is like unto a god's creative call,
Commanding in my soul new loves to rise
Until my soul is full of souls of love.

Unconscious witch'ry prompts thy feet to move;
And to thy step a thousand graces cling—
Thy laughter bursts the perfumed buds of spring.

One morn I slumbered softly toward the dawn,
And dreamed that from the diamon'd dome above
The morning and the evening stars came down.
I woke, and lo! the stars in truth were there—
Your eyes were fondly looking into mine—
Had twinkled morn-dreams through my drowsy lids,
Had lingered there to prove that dreams were true.
Oh, hallowed be the memory of that morn,
And unto death may all its sweetness last—
Upon my breast your sun-lit tresses lay—
You'd turned from bliss of night to joy of day.

She wadded the paper in her hand and stood glaring at him. "Well, what now?" he asked.

"What *now*, you brute! Isn't this enough? You pretend to love me and you write this miserable stuff to *her*."

"If the stuff is miserable, and I don't dispute you there, no harm has been done. Let me tear it."

"No! I won't!" she cried, springing back.

"If you'll just be calm a minute, Judith, I will tell you all about it. I was writing one day and Alma was with me. She innocently asked me to write something for her and I idly scratched off those lines. They mean nothing."

"Oh, of course not," she replied scornfully. "Nothing that you do means anything. But I will make this mean something; I will take it to the Father."

"Come back, Judith," he called, following her to the door. "All right then, go and show it to him, and he will tell you to go to bed."

She wheeled about and looked as though she were ready to spring upon him. "He would never tell me to go to *your* bed, wretch."

"And if he did," Bryce replied, "I would swear to him that I would not follow you."

"Infamous brute!" she cried.

"I won't put up with your insults. Here, give me that paper."

"I won't, scoundrel!"

"But you will give it to *me!*" a voice cried, and Alma stood there, pale, tremulous with rage.

"Will I?" Judith shrieked. "Will I?" She sprang back, tore the paper into bits, threw them upon the floor, stamped upon them, spat upon them.

"Huzzy!"

"She wolf!"

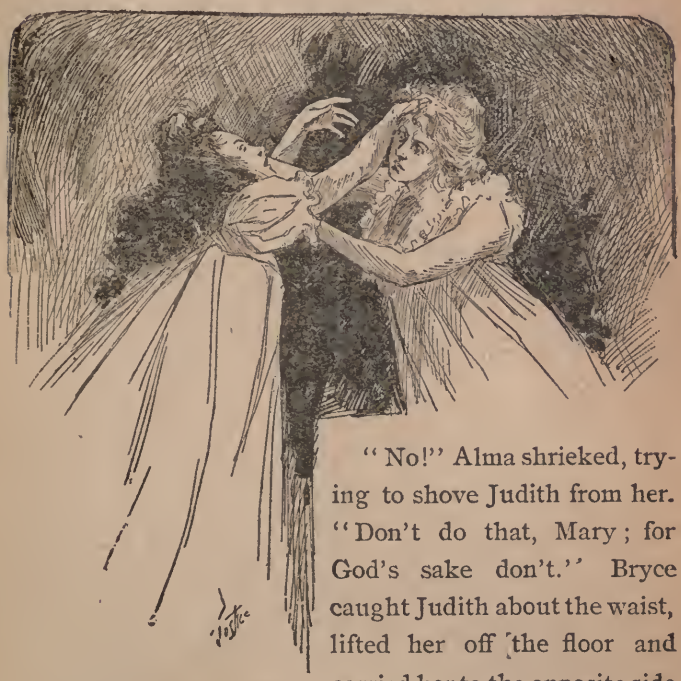
They darted at each other with fingers crooked and stiffened, and Bryce strove to get between them. Their hands were grabbled in each others hair; they shrieked in their fury. The other girls came running from their rooms.

"Let them pull each other to pieces," Rachel cried. "Fight; I don't care if you kill each other."

"Oh, shame on you!" Silvia exclaimed, striving to

help Bryce separate them. They were like two dogs; they had shut their eyes; they were panting and tugging.

"Mary," Bryce commanded, "go and tell the Father and the Councilmen to come here."



"No!" Alma shrieked, trying to shove Judith from her. "Don't do that, Mary; for God's sake don't." Bryce caught Judith about the waist, lifted her off the floor and carried her to the opposite side of the room. He put her down; she fell upon the floor and lay there, sobbing. Bryce bent over her, sought to

soothe her. "Get away!" she cried, "I hate you, I hate you all."

Bryce hastened to Alma and whispered: "See if you can quiet her. It will be better for you and me. Tell her that I wrote the lines for fun, that I told you they meant nothing. If you love me, beg her pardon."

"A strong test of love, Joseph."

"I know, but if you love me you will."

She went to Judith and bent over her. "I humbly beg your pardon," she said, speaking slowly and looking at Bryce. "He did not really mean those lines for me; he said they were better intended for you. Yes, he did; I will swear it." She looked at Bryce. He nodded his approval, and she continued: "I know that he does not love me as much as he does you, but that is no fault of his. And you know I always loved you, Judith; you know I told them that unless you were elected a Wife of the Prophet I did not want to serve. There, now, get up and go to your room, won't you? The Father and the Council know nothing of this and shall know nothing of it. Here, Joseph, she will go with you."

CHAPTER XIII.

In the school-room the air was close, and drowsy was the day. The teacher was wont to look to the Sabbath as a time of rest, that being the only day when school was not kept, but now he thought upon it with disgust. He was to stand in the midst of those long-haired fanatics and tell them that from a frying-pan the Lord had called forth hot grease wherewith to blister a scoffer. Troublously he mused over the scene of the night before, and he said to himself: "A lover or a politician is a fool when you give him a pen." At the breakfast-table all had been smooth, and Boyle, who had eaten with the Prophet and the Wives, had discovered no trace of their disturbance.

The men were done gathering the corn, and the flax was drying in the sun. It would soon be time to draw in wood for the winter. Bryce reflected that the horses had rested, and that now they could travel far in a night. The day after the Sabbath he could be alone with Alma, and on the night thereafter they must leave the village; it would not be wise to wait until the horses should be jaded with the drawing of the wood.

The time came for the children to read their compositions. Several of the parents were present, and an old man stood near the doorway to catch the mumbled words of a grandson. At last the school was dismissed and, weary and with a headache, Bryce turned toward the woods.

"I will go with you, Joseph."

He looked around and saw the Father approaching. "You are welcome, Father," he said, telling his groove-worn lie. "Indeed, I was looking for you."

"I thank you," the old man replied, taking his arm. "Whither shall we walk?"

"Your way, Father, will be a pleasant path to me."

The old man pressed Bryce's arm close to him. "Ah, Joseph, you are daily becoming more and more of a delight to us all, and it is with distress, my son, that I sometimes mark your nervousness. Of late you have been keeping too close to your school; I told Councilman Boyle that we would better relieve you of those confining duties, but he has been loth to agree with me, so strong a faith has he in your ability to teach the young. I think that it would be well to grant you a hunting season. Much game, I am told by Councilman Trent, still abounds in the woods. Ah, my dear son," and closer still did he draw Bryce to him, "our little Silvia has with much modesty confided to her mother a glorious news of

herself. All is well, Joseph, and that was all I wished to say. I will now leave you to walk alone, to commune, for the brethren do expect much of you to-morrow."

The old man turned back and Bryce walked slowly onward, now under the trees where the yellow leaves were falling, now down into the gulch whither the dead leaves were drifting. He sat upon a stone with his feet resting upon a mat of gray grass that clung to a patch of soil. He uncovered his head that the cool air might fan him. He thought of Solomon, the wise man, and wondered not that he had written of the vexation of the spirit. Now he would not have argued that to follow the promptings of nature, no matter what those promptings might be, was a pardonable philosophy. And how weak a protection was simple innocence. Throughout the whole Christian world was not the education of girls a false and dangerous training? Was it better to keep them in ignorance of evil, to let them steal a knowlenge of that evil? A wisdom stolen tempts a stealthy use. "What am I trying to think about?" he asked himself. "What do I know or what do I need to care about the education of girls? In this world there is no woman to disgrace me. Why is it that men are so much afraid of being humiliated by their daughters? They have no such fear of their sons, and yet the penitentiary is full of sons."

He heard something and looked up. Benjamin stood near him. "Have I disturbed you, Joseph?"

"No, I was not thinking, I was vaguely floundering about." This was so near a truth that Bryce wondered at it, was surprised at his own voice as he uttered it.

"Then you were not trying to eak an inspiration?"

"Benjamin, your words are almost irreverent."

"Pardon me, Joseph, I knew not what I was going to say. To break a colt we need one bridle; to break a tongue, we need ten."

"Sit down, Benjamin."

"No, I will stand here. Joseph, did you ever think of the anguish a man can endure for the sake of his religion?"

"For religion, Benjamin, the greatest anguish of this world has been endured. Men have stood in fire praising God."

"Yes, but the fire consummed them and they suffered no more. There is torture, though, that is worse than fire. Ice on the heart is worse than fire, Joseph."

"Yes, and a corpse shrouded and stretched stiff upon the mind is worse than a fire, Benjamin."

"What do you mean?" Benjamin cried, moving closer to Bryce. "Who has a corpse on his mind?" He stood there with his hands pressed against his head. "Has such a vision been given you? God, man, you are looking into my brain. Take your eyes away."

Bryce looked down and he heard Benjamin's iron shod shoe heels striking hard against the rocks. He was alone. Night was coming on and dark shadows lay about him. A wind came with the shadows and and dead leaves whirled at his feet. Before dark he must return to the village; his footsteps were not steady and he was afraid of falling.

The night had been feverish. Early at morning Bryce heard the cry, "Prepare ye, for the day of worship is come." And he mused that once more he must torture his weak and sickened brain until it should cry out in a frenzied yelp. At the breakfast table old Boyle was waiting for him. The morning was bright and the merigolds at the door having escaped the first frost, were blooming afresh, but the old man's face was severe. "Joseph," he said, when Bryce had sat down, "I hope that the Lord will be with you to-day."

"I hope, sir," Bryce replied, "that He may be with me and you, not only to-day, but until time shall cease, and then remain with us in eternity."

"It is well, Joseph. You speak as one who has meditated, and I trust that in your sermon to-day you may dwell upon the anguish of the sinners that scoff at salvation. Tell us not of flowers, for in a rosebud may lie hidden a seed of iniquity. The devil would deaden our senses with a sweet perfume that he might easier steal

the soul. Tell us of the thorn that pricks us onward toward our duty. In the Temple I shall not attempt to preach to day, for texts have flown me by, but I charge you and your wives to come unto my house when your sermon is done, for then will I unfold to you the hidden beauties of our holy creed."

Bryce felt that his flesh was raw, and that the old man had given it a dash of powdered salt. Here was a galling prospect: to sit within doors, and to hear that nasal-twanged voice grate and grind on a subject that had become sickening. He could force himself to preach his own sermon, but again to listen to old Boyle was a strain more than he could bear; he fancied that he could hear his nerves shrink; he felt that they had been shredded and hung in the air about him.

"Did you understand me, Joseph?"

"I do, sir; but I must tell you that I cannot be there. I am not well, and to sit in a room after having gone through the labor of my own sermon will be too severe a tax. In your words, sir, there is wisdom; but a sick man needs medicine, rather than wisdom, and unless the Father commands otherwise I shall seek the tonic of fresh air."

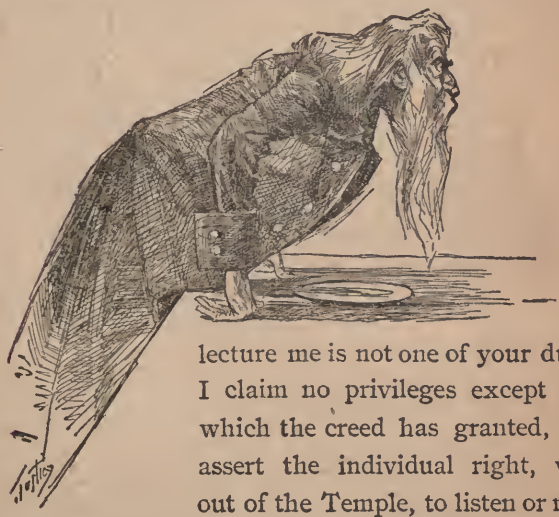
The Wives had looked at one another, and now were looking at Bryce. The Councilman had put down his knife and fork, and had sat himself back from the table.

"What, rebellion!" the old man said, slowly and deeply pronouncing the words.

"No, sir; not rebellion, but protection. You have no authority to command me."

"Sir, I am a Councilman of the chosen people of God."

"I grant you that, and I respect your office, but to



lecture me is not one of your duties. I claim no privileges except those which the creed has granted, but I assert the individual right, while out of the Temple, to listen or not to listen, to sit within doors or roam about. You have taken it upon yourself to be my special adviser, but let me tell you that I need no special advice."

"Rebellion!" muttered the old man, getting up; "rebellion!" he repeated, turning toward the door. A shadow fell upon the threshold and the Father stood there.

"What did I hear you say, Councilman Boyle?" the Father asked.

"You heard me say rebellion," the Councilman answered, "but I may have used the wrong word. It was this way, Father, and when I have set it forth you will see that I was indeed provoked: I told Joseph that he must come to my house after preaching in the temple, and that I would thereupon unfold the beauties of our creed, whereupon he replied that he would not be there. And does not that come near being rebellion?"

"Councilman Boyle," said the Father, "we all know that to listen to you is to hear the words of true wisdom, but Joseph is not well and therefore you should excuse him."

"Which I most heartily do," replied Boyle, stepping back and shaking hands with Bryce.

"Ah, brethren," the Father graciously said, "that is the spirit that should prevail among the chosen of the Lord. Let us give thanks that among us it is as much our spirit to forgive as it is to ask forgiveness. But come, my dear brothers, our people are going toward the temple, showing their eagerness to hear Joseph, and it is not right to keep them waiting."

When Bryce stepped upon the platform and turned toward that array of solemn faces, he wondered what Hartley would think could he see him now, striving to

bear, to rip out of himself a tatter of words wherewith to edify a congregation. His nervousness was plain upon him, but his physical disturbance soon aroused a mental emotion. Simple words came to him with new strength in their meaning; pictures followed, pictures as bright as the leaf rugs which the sun, the frost and fancy had painted upon the sumac bushes, far away on the hill. For weeks his brain had refused him light, and he had compared it to a pile of wet straw, but now he had forced it to burn, and he felt that he was standing in a smoke and a glare. Striking out from him with his fists, he thrust upon them the scoffer and the blazing pan. Loud groans arose and amid them was a wild shout of joy, the revenge cry of Councilman Boyle. He sprang upon the platform and caught Bryce in his arms, for the sermon was brought to an end. He hugged him and shouted in ecstasy. "The seal of glory is upon thy revenge, O God!" he cried. "Pour Thy blazing wrath upon the scoffers of Thy people. Blister not only their hands, O Lord, but burn their hearts to a dead crisp; burn their blood and the blood of their children, born in sin and in enmity to Thee. Let their flesh quiver in agony; let their tongues be torn out and cast to the buzzards of the air. Joseph, my dear brother, forgive me for the harsh words I spoke unto you this morning, for I was blind, and in my deafness I could not hear the inspiring

words that rumbled in your soul. Go to the woods, go to the mountains, in the valley to seek your rest, for I shall strive not to instruct you. You are far beyond me; you are inspired of the Lord."

The congregation was slowly filing out. The Father stood there with his arms folded. "Yes, Joseph," he said, "seek your rest. Your words this day were born to live forever. In the gorges of the mountains will they lodge; into the rocks will they eat their way, and when at last the pernicious of the earth shall refuse salvation, those words like a fiery lash will scourge them into torment."

Bryce walked home alone and no one followed him. His wives were gathered in the circular room and they whispered and looked in wonder at him when he entered. They were stricken with remorse; they strove to be affectionate toward one another.

"Sit down in the midst of us, Joseph," Judith requested, making room for him. He sat on the settee and there was no dissension as to who should take the place beside him.

Rachel went swiftly to him, stood beside him and gently putting back his hair asked if he would forgive them for their wickedness. "Oh, we have been just as bad as we could be," she said, "and we deserve to be punished, but we do hope that you will forgive us. We all love you."

He looked up and smiled at her. Judith saw the smile and she said: "Rachel, you would better sit down. Joseph is tired."

"But I am not leaning on him, sister."

"I know, but you might worry him."

"No I won't. Let me alone, please."

"I'm not doing anything to you, I am sure. I just told you not to worry Joseph when he is tired."

"Oh, I know what you just told me, and I know also that you never think of his being tired when you are near him."

"I think it is time for both of you to hush," said Alma. "The first thing you know you will be quarreling."

"I am sure some people can talk without quarreling," Judith replied, and Alma rejoined: "I am sure some people cannot."

"Do you mean that I am one of them?" Judith asked.

"Am I indeed so vague that you have constantly to ask me for my meaning? I have been told that my meaning is nearly always clear."

"If you are going to quarrel," said Bryce, "I will go to the woods. "I thought that you wanted forgiveness. And is this the way you merit it?"

"Please forgive us, dear Joseph," Alma pleaded. "It was my fault again and I ask your pardon."

"No, Alma," said Judith, "it was not your fault; it was mine, and I beg of Joseph to forgive me."

"But can't he forgive us both at once?" Alma insisted. "It won't take him any longer and it won't put him to any more trouble to include me in his forgiveness."

"That is just like you, Alma," Judith declared. "You always want to be included in everything."

"Are you going to hush, or must I go to the woods?" Bryce asked.

"I am hushed," Alma answered.

"So am I," said Judith.

"And it is time," Rachel spoke up, "for here comes Benjamin."

The young man came in and Silvia got up and gave him her stool. With a bow and a smile he acknowledged her courtesy, but he said that he preferred not to sit down; he had but a few moments to stay; he simply desired to speak to Joseph. "I have heard the Father say," he went on, "that you are not well, Joseph, that you need rest, and I told him that I would take the school off your hands for a few days."

"Benjamin, you are exceedingly kind, and gratefully shall I accept your offer," Bryce replied. "I think that freedom from care, that lolling about in the woods for a few days will bring my strength back, and I wish you to tell the little people that I shall soon be with them

again. Won't you sit down. Stay and go to dinner with us."

"No, I eat to-day with Councilman Trent. Will you permit me to see you alone for a few moments?"

Bryce walked to the door with him and there they halted. For a time Benjamin was silent; he appeared to be embarrassed. "Joseph," he said, "in the strength and fire of your eloquence you can do much; verily it seems to me that you can almost move a mountain." He hesitated and looked down.

"What is it you would ask of me, Benjamin?"

"I am so weak of words and so fumbling, Joseph, that I fear that my wish, no matter how I present it, will seem rude and sudden to you. Let us walk out here."

They walked out to the well, and Bryce stood with his hand resting on the curbing. Benjamin looked down into the dark water. He made several attempts to speak; he turned his back upon Bryce; he walked off a short distance and came back to gaze again into the well.

"Speak out, Benjamin."

"I will try. I may have doubted at one time that you were — I can not say that I doubted the truth of your mission. Wait a moment: At one time it seemed hard that you should have come to claim the Wives; that after so many generations the fulfillment should have come when my — my heart was at stake." He was wiping his

face with a handkerchief. Bryce waited for him to continue. "There are numerous mothers and grandmothers here who served as Wives of the Prophet, and afterward they became the natural wives of loving husbands. And to be a Wife of the Prophet was simply a postponement of the temporal marriage. Several of the girls who are now your wives were engaged to be married, but your coming forever set those engagements aside. You are graceful and handsome, and upon seeing you they fell in love with you, ah, and with a deeper love than it was thought that a Wife of the Prophet would give unto him. Among those girls, Joseph, is Alma. She was engaged to marry me, but she was chosen. I could not object, for I was proud of her. But the Prophet came." He was silent again; he leaned far over and gazed down into the well. "When the temple bell rang, my heart shook," he continued, "and when I saw you my heart broke. I stood there and beheld you marry her; I heard you whispering to her; I saw her eye kindle, and I knew that she had forgotten me."

"Wait a moment, Benjamin. What you say may all be true, but was it any fault of mine? When I was directed to come hither, did I know that I was to break hearts and set my feet upon the hopes and longings ——"

"Joseph, I beg of you not to misunderstand me," Benjamin broke in. "I know that it was no fault of yours,

I know that you had not been consulted but had been directed. But let that pass. I am now coming to my request. When I heard your sermon to-day, I felt that nothing was beyond the influence of your words; I felt that any request that you might make of the Council would be granted, and therefore I beg of you to make a request. Meet the Councilmen in the Temple, tell them that Alma has received all the honors that could come—I do not mean that, exactly. Tell them that Alma has served faithfully as a Wife of the Prophet, and that in view of the substitution of some other maiden, you will consent to the setting aside of the ties that bind her to you, that you will give her to me. Don't say that it cannot be done, Joseph; don't say that they will frown upon it, for nearly all things are possible with you. It is a bruised, a broken heart that is pleading now, and I implore you not to turn from it. Look down deep into your soul and see if something does not command you to heed my request. I dreamed that God in His sweet mercy would make this duty known to you, and I beg of you to reflect, to see if He has not. And if you think that He has, tell the Council so."

Bryce knew not what to say. It was his time to fumble about for words, "But Benjamin, suppose that Alma should not feel that it is her duty to obey? Even granting that I could move the Council, what about her?"

"Make her feel that it is her duty; make her tremble under your words. No, argue gently with her."

This indeed was a time for Bryce to lie and he lied. He saw that Benjamin had worked himself almost into a frenzy and that not to humor him would be extremely dangerous—might ruin the plans that he had laid for Alma and himself. "Benjamin," he said, "I will do what you ask, and I feel in my heart that my request will be granted. But first I shall talk to Alma, for then I can tell the Council that it is also her wish. Wait!" Benjamin had leaped over the well and was striving to grasp Bryce by the hand. "Be careful; some one might see us. To-morrow I shall be alone with Alma; we will walk in the woods together, and the next day I will meet the Council. Hush; there comes a woman to tell us that dinner is ready."

CHAPTER XIV.

Early at morning while Bryce was walking about the village, he met Alma's mother. She appeared happier than usual and when she had drawn near, she said: "God bless you, Joseph, you and my daughter, and God bless a promise that is made known unto her." She did not stop, but straightway to the weaving room she went, singing a quaint old song. Benjamin went into the schoolhouse, and Bryce saw the children slowly following him. A little girl came along. She looked earnestly at Bryce and told him that she was so sorry that he was not well.

"I shall be well within a few days," he replied, "and then I will come back to you." He lifted her from the ground, kissed her and putting her down, told her to run along, that school was taken in. He was waiting for Alma who was at home putting her room in order. She came smiling, singing, fresh as a hazel bud. She asked him whither should they go, and he replied: "Let us climb the west mountain and sit on the top. Will that suit you?"

"To sit any where with you, dear, will suit me," she answered.

They passed the school house and saw Benjamin eagerly looking after them. They climbed to the spot where Bryce and Rachel had sat, looking down into the fading sun. They heard the ringing of axes; the men had begun to cut the winter's wood. Alma spread a shawl upon a rock and they sat upon it.

"Joseph, it is heavenly to be alone with you. And oh, the time has been so long. I wonder if it seems so long to you?"

"It has been an eternity, precious. Alma, I wish that you and I could live together, away off somewhere; I wish that we had met in the world and were now of the world."

"Do you really?" she asked, taking both his hands and pressing them to her cheeks.

"Yes, in the world, of the world and alone. It is impossible to keep up a pretense of love; it is a natural impulse to smile upon the one we love, but when I smile upon you there is jealousy and rage. I thought that I could write my love and silently give it to you, but no, it was louder than if it had been shouted from the top of the Temple."

"I am so sorry that I lost those lines," she said. "And I don't see how I did. Won't you write them again?"

"Yes, some time."

They sat in silence, she playing with his hand, he wondering how he should make her, without a shock, acquainted with his plans. One girl had run away from the village and had come back miserable, degraded, to beg for mercy and then to die. He was afraid bluntly to tell her of his scheme, afraid to hear himself pronounce the words that should place him before her in a new and unexpected position. He turned and looked down at the village; he saw a woman at the well, saw a man and a boy grinding an axe.

"How plain everything is down there," she said, following his eyes. "There is Benjamin standing in the school house door."

"Alma, if it were in my heart to hate a man I should hate him."

She looked searchingly at him. "Why should you hate him, Joseph?"

"Because he was to be your husband, to kiss your soft lips."

"Who told you that?"

"I dreamed it night after night until I knew that it was true."

"And I do not deny it, Joseph. Yes, he was to marry me."

"But did you love him?"

"As love then went, I did; but as I have found love to go, I did not. Between the love I gave him and the love I give you, there are rivers and forests and mountains, so great is the distance. He is strong and quick at his books; but you are noble and quick to find the beautiful secrets that nature has hidden in the woods. He could interest me, but you thrill me. My heart listened to him, but my soul is eager to catch your words. I know but little of the nature of the woman who lives in the world to-day; the life that I have read about lies far back in the past when speech might not have meant so much, but when it was adorned with figures. Women then professed to love the noble and the brave. I am one of those women, and you are noble and brave."

"There are women of the world to-day who love the noble and the brave," Bryce replied, "but their mothers and their fathers would have them love money. A woman may marry for love, and yet she will teach her daughter to marry for money. In the world the preachers tell us that the love of money is the root of all evil, and the next day they accept a call at a higher salary. In the world we may respect a poor man, but in that respect there is a shade of pity. It is hard to believe that poverty is virtuous. But we are getting away from the subject. You would have been happy with Benjamin."

"I should have been contented, but not happy, Joseph. You brought happiness, and had you not come I should never have known the true meaning of the word.'

"But, Alma, in that stream of happiness, which should be so pure and clear, there are muddy streaks and the drifting trash of jealousies."

"Yes, Joseph, for human nature lives even in this quiet village, and who is so human as a wife?"

"A husband, Alma. And now, with religion put aside, should we not love each other with a passion purely human, strong, devoted?"

"What do you mean by putting religion aside?"

"I mean that should we not love each other beyond the command of our creed?"

"Love is born of God, Joseph, and no love is stronger than God's."

"Have you forgotten that book you read, 'The Age of Reason'?"

"No; but that book did not teach me to disbelieve in the love of God."

"True; but it inveighed against creeds."

"Not against mine; it knew nothing of my creed."

He fell into a meditative, uneasy silence. She talked on about the things that surrounded them, the high rocks to the left, the view sloping down into the west. He knew that she would go with him, that for him she would trample upon her creed. In many respects she was stronger than any woman he had known, and he knew that she loved him with all her strength. In a sentence he could tell her that she must run away with him, but how could he do so without giving her a shock? He put his arms about her and held her close against his breast, told her that with her he could live the life of a woodcutter in the mountains and be happy; that without her he could but look upon God's heaven as a wilderness. And fondly she kissed him, told him there was no heaven sweeter than his smile.

Now his time was come, and yet he could not speak the words; he stumbled and fell short of an utterance of them. The conditions were not favorable; the sun was

too bright; the ringing of the axes, far away, annoyed him. He would wait for the coming of darkness.

They heard the dinner horn and homeward they slowly strolled, picking red haws that grew by the way. At the table Silvia said that after dinner Mr. Joseph must not think that he could take himself off to the woods, that the girls had too long been cheated of a story that was due them. Alma protested. She said that Joseph was tired.

"No doubt he has talked all the morning," Judith replied, "but he has not talked to us and I think that we ought to share his vacation."

"Won't you please tell us a story," Mary pleaded. "It is so dull at the house when you are not there."

"Yes, little one, I will tell a story," Bryce answered.

"You wouldn't agree to tell it when I asked you," Judith spoke up; "but I suppose you will let me hear it."

They sat about him in the circular room and he told them a story of love, of the devotion of a woman, her bravery and the sacrifices she made. For the man she loved she turned her back upon her father and her religion, and the neighbors said that misery would be her lot, but God gave her days of happiness and sweetened her nights with joyous dreams.

"Oh, you must like that story yourself," Rachel cried. "You tell it better than you told any of the others."

"Yes, I like it," Bryce answered, "for it is full of the devotion of woman, and her devotion is her glory. She was created for sacrifice, to be the tenderest and purest of God's creatures, or the vilest scum of the earth."

"But if she is tender and pure how could she be vile?" Mary asked.

"Little one, the world sees to that; the world has robbed purity of its bread and scornfully has commanded—'Go into the gutter and be filthy in order that you may eat?'"

"I don't know what you mean," said Silvia, "but I don't like to hear you talk that way. Tell us another story; something to make us laugh."

"There was an echo from the world," Bryce replied.

"Does the world want to laugh?" she asked. "If it does it can't be so very bad. When children laugh they are good, but when they cry they are bad."

"Ladies," said Bryce, laughing, "You are too swift for me. I can't keep up with your little conceits."

He told them a story that made them laugh and they skipped about him like children in a frolic, and they were teasing him for more when Benjamin looked in upon them.

"Joseph, may I see you a moment?" he asked.

Bryce went to the door and Benjamin motioned him to come outside. Bryce followed him to the well. "Have you told her?" the young man asked.

"I have lead her up to the very point. I found that I had to be cautious, but I will tell her."

"When?"

"To-night."

"Did you ask her if she loved me?"

"Yes, and she said that she loved you devotedly."

"God bless you, Joseph. I trembled all last night. I thought over what I had asked you to do, and it seemed an enormous piece of sacrilege, but where there is so deep and true a love, Joseph, how could there be a sacrilege? My heart and my soul yearn for her and should I be punished for that? I love my religion and I expect one day to be the Father of the chosen, but I love Alma and who put that love there? You say you will tell her to-night, Joseph?"

"Yes, we will go away in secret and I will then tell her that she must obey my command."

"And do you believe that she will be willing even though she loves me to leave the Prophet's house?"

"When I tell her that it is the will of the Council, she will thank me with tears of joy in her eyes."

"Oh, can there be so much happiness on this earth? Joseph, at the end of the street back of the temple there is a house in which no one lives. Last night when I could not sleep I got up and went to look at that house, and I prayed that she and I might live there, and your

words make me feel that we shall. What time to-night can you let me know, Joseph?"

"Perhaps not at all to-night. Come to my house early at morning. Go to your room and remain there all night, praying. Do not move about as though you are anxious. I don't want the Council to suspect that you prompted the request which I shall make."

"I will do as you direct, Joseph. I must now go back to the school. Early to-morrow morning I shall be at your door."

CHAPTER XV.

When the day was done, when supper had been eaten and the clatter of dishes was no longer heard, Bryce strolled alone about the village. He went to the stable, into the room where the bridles were kept; he looked at the horses and picked out two that he thought were the strongest. He opened and shut the door time and again to find out whether the hinges would creak. Sheep skins served the purpose of saddles, and he selected two, put them into a corner and covered them with straw.

He strode toward the Prophet's house, he heard the rocking of rude cradles and the songs that women were singing to their children. He had told Alma that when darkness should come he wanted her to go to the woods with him, that he had something of most serious consequence to say to her, and as he approached the house he saw her standing in the door, and drawing near enough for the light to fall upon him, he motioned her and she came to him.

"I am ready, Joseph."

"Don't speak loud; I want no one to hear us."

"Whither shall we go?"

"To the beech tree near the hollow sounding rock."

They made no noise, they met no one. "Sit here on the rock," he said when they reached the tree. "Oh, you are going to spread a shawl. You are considerate."

They heard the cry of an owl mingled with the roar of the falling water. "Alma, I am going to tell you something that may shock you."

"Then you must be going to tell me that you do not love me, for that alone could shock me."

"No; I am going to tell you that I worship you."

"That warms my heart but does not shock me, Joseph."

"But that worship may lead to a shock. You know that I have many times spoken of the happiness that would come to us if we were alone."

"Yes, Joseph, we are alone now and happiness is with us."

"Yes, we are alone for the moment but within a short distance from here are others that have a claim upon me; and I have grown to love you until I despise that claim. Oh, that we were of the world, in the world and alone. You have been taught to despise the world, but the world belongs to God."

"But the people are not His chosen ones, Joseph."

"Some of them are. In cities, within hearing of the night-cry of vice, where the black shadows of sin are lying, there is virtue sweet and simple. But we care naught for

the world, but for each other. Alma, I want you to live alone with me. Look," he said rising and bending over her, "the village is dark, the people are sinking to sleep. Let us fly from this place, go far away and live in each other's love. I cannot endure it here any longer; I can endure it no where without you. The horses are waiting for us, the sun has darkened the world that no one may see us, and by the time the light of morning shall come we can be far away. Listen to me. Love is my religion and you are my creed. The religion of this village is narrow and soul-stifling. Your mind is too broad to live in it. Alma, you look for the Saviour of mankind. He has come; He came nearly two thousand years ago and suffered death on a cross. Your religion was the invention of a fanatic, your fathers and your grandfathers were deceived."

She sprang from the rock. "What are you telling me!" she cried.

"That I am a man; that I was not inspired to come to this place; that I love you; that I want you to be my wife as the world knows a wife. "Alma!" he cried, catching at her, but she sprang back. "Don't touch me!" she commanded. "You were not inspired? And all this has been a deception. Merciful God! can this be true?"

"Alma, listen to me; go away with me."

"I will not listen to you; I will not go away with you. If you have deceived God, you would deceive me. Don't

you touch me. Give me time to think. Oh, what have you told me!" she sobbed. "Oh, my heart is bleeding!" She sank upon her knees, sobbing. "What have I heard! What have I heard!" she repeated over and over again. He strove to lift her. "Get away!" she shrieked, springing to her feet. "Get back, you base creature; I hate you. To come among us—" She broke down.

"Alma, it was my love that revealed all this to you. The horses are ready: come with me. I will take you to a city; I will show you what life is. Nothing but love could have wrung such a confession from me. Come, Alma."

"If you touch me I will try to kill you!" she cried. "Don't you follow me."

"Come back, Alma! What, you are not going back to the village?"

"I am going to my father's house," she sobbed.

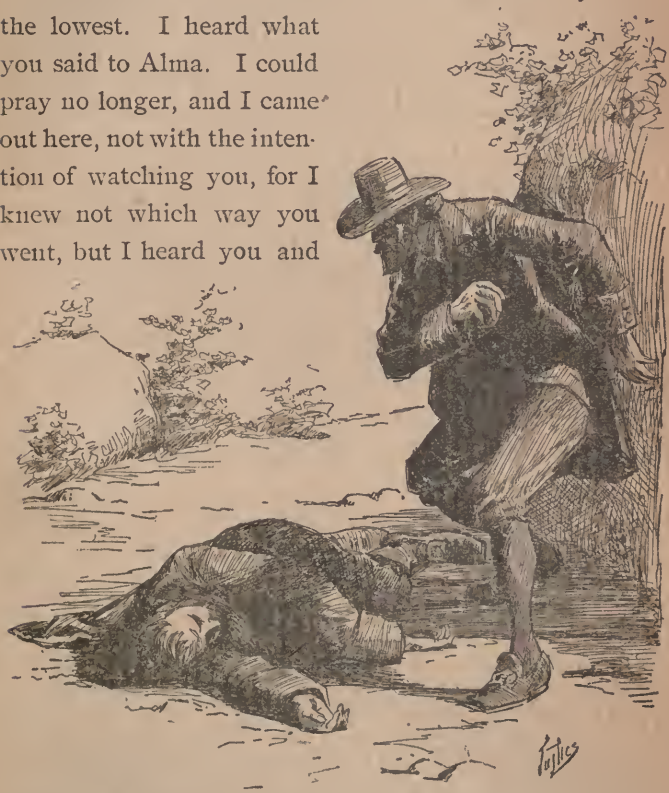
"You shall not! Stop; I will choke you."

She sprang away from him and was gone. He dared not follow her. It was now a question of saving his own life. She would soon reach the village and spread the news of his infamy. The men would be after him like a pack of wolves. The moon was rising. He wheeled about and started down the creek.

"Stop!" a voice commanded. Benjamin stood in front of him.

"What do you want?" Bryce asked.

"Man, I don't know what your name is, of all the scoundrels that ever slimed the face of the earth you are the lowest. I heard what you said to Alma. I could pray no longer, and I came out here, not with the intention of watching you, for I knew not which way you went, but I heard you and



that is sufficient. You are going to the village with me."

"I am not; I am going my own way."

"Yes, and your way leads to hell; but first you are going with me."

"Stand aside! I don't want to hurt you."

Benjamin leaped forward to seize him. Bryce caught up a stone with a sweep of his hand, and, still holding it, struck Benjamin on the head, and senseless he fell to the ground.

Down the creek Bryce ran, scrambling over the rocks, plunging through the darkness, now in the black shadow of a cliff, now in the glimmering light of the rising moon. He stumbled and fell down a steep place, and a stone dislodged by his scrambling, rolled down and fell upon him. He was sure that one of his legs was broken and he cried out in anguish, and frightened at the alarming loudness of his voice, he listened breathlessly, expecting to hear the tramp of hurrying feet. He got up, and limping, struggled onward, but in his eagerness he soon forgot his lameness. Now he climbed the cliff whereon he and Silvia had stood; the moonlight lay about him and he hastened down the other side into the shadow. Where the way was level, he ran; where it was rough he struggled hard, taking dangerous chances at every jump. Here were the dells, and across the creek was the deep gorge that seemed to invite the stream to quit its ancient course. Here was the Witch Hole. He halted, and panting, stood for a moment on the brink. Again he

fancied that he saw a shudder, a cold chill running up and down the creek. Moonlight fell upon the pool, and he saw dead leaves floating round and round. He listened. No sound save the far off cry of a night bird and the whimsical bark of a fox. He wheeled about and ran down to the river. His intention was to cross the stream, and in the hope of finding a canoe he walked up and down the bank, under the dark, overhanging trees. There was no canoe. He heard the cold water rippling against a snag. He gazed toward the opposite shore—an intangible smear of black—dreary, frightening. But he must cross. He found a drift log and he strove to roll it into the water. One end was buried, and he got down on his knees and dug away the sand like a dog scratching after a mole. He rolled the log into the water, pushing it out, and sprang upon it. It turned and into the river he was soused. He clawed at the log and it turned over and over. The water benumbed him and his teeth chattered. His feet touched a sand bar, and he pulled the log toward him and got upon it, lay on his breast with his legs hanging in the water, paddling with his hands. He must fight the current and wait for a bend in the river to land him on the opposite shore. He was below the place where the steamboat had landed him, and he knew that the river was crooked. The moon was above the timber and the water was shimmering. He wondered whether he could be seen

from the shore, and he tried to lie closer to the log. He now was well out and he knew that the first bend to the left would land him, but he saw no prospect of a bend. An hour passed and he was slightly beyond the middle of the stream. What if he should thus float until morning? They would shoot him, pick him off like a turtle. He wondered if he had killed Benjamin. He thought that he had felt his skull crush. But no matter, it had to be done; he would have dragged him back to the village and old Boyle would have skinned him alive. Strange that Alma should have refused to go with him. He had not been adroit enough, he had been too sudden. How was he to rid himself of his preposterous clothes? He had no money, not a penny. The plan had been badly drawn, and miserably had it been executed.

Far below he saw the shore line jut out in a cape of darkness, and he knew that he was nearing a bend in the stream. Hard now he struggled against the current, but the log began to turn and he had to scramble to stay on top. Yes, it was a bend, the whirling of the current proved it, proved also that it would be no easy place to land—no low lying point, but a bluff of rocks. Faster and faster the current flowed and the log seemed to be moved by the spirit of excited flight. He heard a roar as if a storm were struggling amid the tree tops. He saw a wall of rock; saw the foaming water leap in the moon-

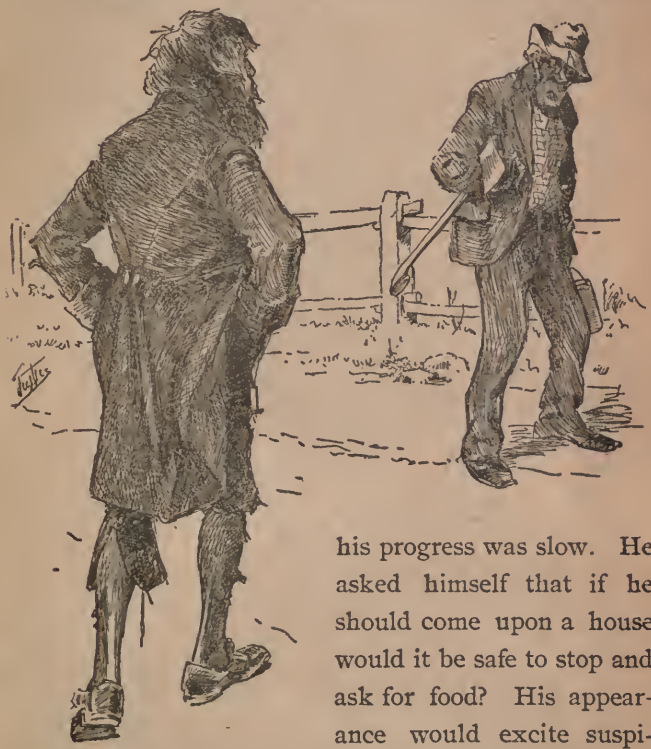
light. He strove against the current, to pull his treacherous craft out further into the stream. The log turned, whirled around, threw him off, sped away from him, was gone. Over and over he was thrown, struck the rock feet first, was tossed up, was caught again by the flood, sucked under, spewed up; round and round he was whirled like a chunk in a suck hole, struggling, almost exhausted. Again he was thrown and this time he caught a point of rock, threw his arms over it and held there. And how sweet to him was this chance to breathe. He looked up, far above into the dim lace work of the night, and he thought to pray, but he was ashamed—ashamed to appeal to Him who had forgiven a thief on the cross. He thought of the criminals whom he had seen in court, of a wretch who had murdered an old woman, but in that docket of crime he could find no one so little deserving of mercy as himself.

The water was pulling at him and his arms were tired. There was a whirlpool between him and the main rock. Should he tempt it? He must needs do something; he could not much longer hold his place. What was that dark, bobbing streak between him and the bluff? He reached forth with one hand, with difficulty holding on with the other, and felt something. It was his log, braced against the point of rock and the main wall. But should he attempt to straddle it and to cross? And what might

he find at the end? He would make the trial. The log danced up and down and the current almost sucked him under it, but gradually he worked his way to the end. The place was not wholly dark, but the circuiting moon was leaving it in the shadow. Whatever he decided to do must be done at once. He felt along and found a break in the rock, a bench, but what was above? He could at least get out of the water. He climbed upon the bench and feeling upward, found another breach, more pronounced than the first one. He climbed upon the second ledge. He walked along, crawled through a broad seam and found another landing, higher up the bluff. Now he was amid a struggling growth of cedars, and he sat down to rest. He wondered what time it could be. It was not much beyond midnight and he was many miles below the Witch Hole. He strove to picture the scene in the village. He could see the Wives of the Prophet, hurrying about in their excitement; he could catch the features of Councilman Boyle, fury-stricken; could see the Father's sad face, could hear the mourning over the dead body of Benjamin.

He resumed his climbing and soon was at the top of the bluff. He rested again and then sheered off to the left, going gradually down into the sweet gum timber of the bottom lands. But now he was so worn that he could scarcely walk, and coming to a place where leaves had

drifted, he lay down to sleep until morning. He awoke with the sun in his eyes. There was no road and he bore off from the river. He was faint and hungry and



his progress was slow. He asked himself that if he should come upon a house would it be safe to stop and ask for food? His appearance would excite suspicion, not indeed that he was a criminal but that he was insane. He had no hat and his hair was tangled. There was one thing that must be done; he must rid himself of

his clothes. He came to a road and he heard a saw mill, but he dared not go near it, and he was walking along the road, but not in the direction of the mill, when he met an old negro.

"Good morning!"

The old man drew back. "I doan' know sah, whuther ter run er way fum you or not."

"I am not going to molest you, uncle."

"I doan' know 'bout dat, sah. Is you sho' you ain' gwine grab me?"

"I will not touch you."

"Well, sah, I'll be 'bleeged ter you fur dat."

"How far am I from Campbell's Bend?"

"Doan' know, sah; neber wuz dar."

That was good news. He had passed it, had come a long distance.

"Well, how far is it to a town?"

"Wall, sah, it ain't so mighty fur ter Gum P'int, but it ain' much o' er town w'en you gits dar; but den I doan' know whut you want wid er town no how. Peer like most any place is good er nuff fur you."

"Yes, for I am a humble preacher of the gospel of the Lord."

"Oh, is you. Den you oughter tole me fo' I flung dem sarcastics at you. I'm a mighty han' ter fling dem things, I tell you. Da waz talkin' 'bout runnin' me outen

dis neighborm neighborhood once jest caze da feered o' me, I cuts 'em so wid dis yere tongue. So you is er preacher. Wall, I has done er little o' dat sort o' business mersef."

"Then I may call your brother," said Bryce, slowly advancing toward him.

"Doan know 'bout dat," the negro replied, drawing back cautiously. "Kain't settle dat p'int till I knows whut yo' faif is; but ef you is one deze year Cam'llites I'se feered o' you."

"I am a Methodist," Bryce said at a venture.

"Whut's dat, er Meferdis? I'se wid you, fer I'se one way down yere in dis yere heart,"

"I am indeed glad to hear it, old man, for I have a favor to ask of you?"

"Whut is it, sah, but lemme tell you it ain't quite time o' day to begin doin' favors. But whut you want me ter do?"

"I want you to exchange coats with me. My coat is better than yours and has twice as much cloth in it. What do you say?"

"I says, sah, dat I ain't pleased wid de cut o' dat gayrment, but I'll swop on er count o' de clof. Yere, gimmy yo' coat fust. I doan wan' you ter take my coat and run off wid it. In dese days I'se sorter 'spicious eben o' bruders in de church. Bruder in de church tuck

er red hankerchuck fum me some time er go an' I ain' seed 'im since. Gimmy. Dat's right; yere's mine. Thankee, sah, but doan' 'sist on swoppin' britches fur dar ain' ez much clof in 'em ez dar is in mine, an' ef you try to make me swop I'll hatter fight you."

"Now can you give me something to eat?" Bryce asked.

"What, is you got mo' fabers ter ax? I'se got er mouful yere in dis bucket dat I was gwine take wid me whar I'se choppin' wood, but I needs it merself caze my appertite is monstus. But I kaint see er pusson suffer, so I'll gin you haf o' it."

"You are a gentleman ever if you are black."

"Look yere, man, doan come talkin' dat er way, caze I'll be fo'ced ter gib you de whole business. Now, sah, yere you is, an' I wushes you good luck; an' good day."

Onward Bryce went, greedily eating the old negro's corn bread and bacon. And in his brown jeans coat he felt that he was one more degree removed from the village of Bolga. But he must have a hat, and he must rid himself of those knee breeches. He passed a cabin and saw a negro woman washing under a tree, and on a fence a short distance away he saw some clothes hanging. He quickened his steps, for his mind was made up; he would sneak around to the fence to see if he could find a pair of trousers. The woman had not seen him. What if this were the place where the humorous and kind-hearted old

negro lived? No matter; this was a time when generosity must be placed under additional contribution. He heard the woman singing. She straightened up to wring out a garment and Bryce got down behind the fence. She spread the garment on a bush and returned to her tub. Bryce crept along the fence until he was under the clothes. He reached up, snatched a pair of cottonade trousers and, bending over, ran into the woods. He soon stopped running, but he walked some distance before he ventured to try on the trousers. They were too short for him, but they were not nearly so short as his knee breeches. He was wretched, but he had to smile at himself, at his shrewdness.

Now it was his aim to go to some town, get shaved, have his hair cut, return to the river far below, and on a steamboat work his way home. A woman came along the road, riding an old mare with a colt following. The mare shied, the colt ran up, sniffed at Bryce, wheeled about and kicked at him.

"He won't hurt you," the woman said. "He's just full of his pranks; the children have spoiled him."

He asked her how far it might be to Gum Point, and she answered that it was not more than two miles. "Are you going there?" she asked. "I left there not more than half an hour ago, and there was considerable excitement going on. Some men came into town with a lot of

hounds and were looking for some man that had got away or something of the sort, I couldn't exactly find out what."

"You say they were looking for a man?"

"Yes, that's what I understood."

"Did they say what the man had done?"

"As I say, I couldn't exactly find out; but I gathered that he ran away from some place up the river, I think."

The woman rode on and Bryce turned off into the woods. They were on his track with bloodhounds, and it was his floating down the river that had thrown them off. He had seen dogs about the village, but had not supposed that they were bloodhounds. He argued that to go to Gum Point would be reckless. Would it not be wise to return to the river, hide until night, and then float down the stream? But would not those keen and restless hounds sneak up and spring upon him in his hiding-place? He wondered whether it would be well to surrender himself to the authorities, to demand the protection of the law. But he knew that the law would not protect him against the demands of those stern men, coming with justice as their plea, with vengeance as their natural right. But he must do something. He heard a twig snap, and he wheeled about with a cry of fright. Then he tried to laugh at his timidity; he had been frightened by a squirrel. Off to the left the timber looked

thickest, the undergrowth rankest, and thither he went, sneaking, startled at every noise. Painfully he worked his way into the midst of a thick patch of blackberry briars, and there he lay down; but his reason, active agent of alarm, told him that the briars would not serve as a protection against the hounds, that they would glide through them like a snake; and out he came to look for another place, to push onward toward a spot where the timber appeared thicker. He knew not that he was going in the direction of the river; he might be going toward the town. When in despair it is man's nature to call upon God, it is a final resort of the scoffer, the atheist, but Bryce shuddered as he turned his eyes upward. Strongly now he believed in a revengeful God and in a personal devil, and he fancied that if he should pray he could hear the devil snicker. He remembered having said to Hartley that the adage, "virtue is its own reward," was a senseless phrase, but how full of meaning it now appeared. "If I keep this up I shall go insane," he mused. "But may I not be insane at this very moment? How do I know that I went to a village called Bolga? I don't know but that I have imagined it all, that I have been in these woods for weeks. I once knew a man who trembled for years lest he might be assassinated by agents sent over by the English government. He believed that he had committed a great crime against that country; perhaps I

merely imagine that I have wronged a community called Bolga." But he rolled up his sleeves and gazed at the pictures on his arms. "But even this may be fancy. Oh, hell! what is the use of this nonsense. I am worse than Cain and the universe hates me. I am to be torn to pieces by dogs and my bones are to be picked by buzzards. But my soul, merciful Christ, what about my soul? Did I not tell her that you had come, that you had been crucified? But why did I tell her? Was it to acknowledge a truth or to weaken her faith in her father's creed?"

He was so tired that he was compelled to rest and he sat down with his back against a tree. He was determined not to think; he would pull his thoughts to pieces and scatter them. The air hummed a drowsy tune and he sank to sleep, and he dreamed, not of frightful things, but of freedom, of pleasant walks amid scenes that memory, holding dear, had mellowed; the thrill of a victory at school came back to him, and he stirred in his sleep. A girl whom he loved attempted to throw a ball and he laughed at her charming awkwardness. He sprang to his feet. A dog scampered away, ran a short distance, turned back and growled at him. He was not dreaming now. Another dog, another, still another, five hounds ran up, snarling, yelping. He heard a horn, he heard a man shout. He turned and fled. The hounds followed, snapping at him, but they were cowardly and he caught

up a stick and fought them off. He thought that his safety lay in the river; the sun was almost down and the men might not see well enough to shoot him. He could hear the horses floundering in the bushes far behind. The dogs were growing bolder and one of them snapped him and he siezed a larger stick and fiercely turned upon them. But they surrounded him and while he was fighting one, another was snapping at him. They would tear him to pieces. He seized a grape vine and climbed up amid the thick branches of a beech tree. Here he was safe from dogs, but the men were coming. His eyes fell upon an open space: he saw the men gallop across it. They were under the tree.

"Come down!" one of them cried. "Come down, Toney, or we'll have to shoot you."

What did they mean by calling him Toney? But he had no time to ask questions; he saw a gun pointed at him. "We give you credit for making a good race. Why, hello here, Bill, this ain't our man!" Bryce was now holding the grape vine within full view of them. He saw that they were not the men of Bolga. "Gentlemen, may I ask why you want me?"

"I gad, that's something we'll have to ask you. We are working a lot of convicts on a new railroad away up the river and one of them got away, and these half hounds simply got on the wrong track. Call 'em off, Bill. Not

worth pizen enough to kill 'em. Mighty sorry, sir, that we've put you to this trouble. Hope you ain't bit."

"No, not much, but I have been scared nearly to death. I am a lone and wandering preacher, seeking to do good in obscure places, but you have brought back a reminder of the old days of persecution. But it was all a mistake of those miserable dogs and I cannot charge you with an evil intention. But you have caused me to lose my hat and I have no money wherewith to buy another. It was an humble covering, sir, but it was the only one I had."

"Sorry. Say, Bill, give him your hat. You've got another one at the stockade."

"Give him yours. You've another one, too."

"I'll do it. Here you are, old man; hop down."

Bryce put on the hat, a wool slouch, thanked the giver, and then asked him how far it was to Gum Point.

"About four miles. Want to go there? Well, hop up here behind me."

It was village bed time when they clattered into the town, and without having attracted much attention, Bryce was put down near a shanty wherein a light was burning. He asked a boy if there were a barber shop in the place, and the boy pointed to the light in the shanty. Inside he found a negro barber scraping the hot jowl of the village drunkard. Bryce told the barber that he wanted a shave and a hair-cut, but that he had no money. The negro

replied that years ago he had got out all the fun there happened to be in the shaving and hair-cutting business, and that now he looked upon it not as a dissipation but as a necessity. The village drunkard got out of the chair, looked at Bryce and said: "If you had come about the time timothy was ripe some fellow might have mowed your crop for you. Dinged if you don't need it. Where have you been ever since the sereech owls went to roost? Hah, where have you been? Preachin'? You look it. Sort of a Sampson in the flock, I take it. But mebby you oughtn't cut off your hair; might lose your grip. Yes, reckon you are a Sampson, and, by the way, I've got some gate posts I'd like for you to move. Get away from that door there, boys; go on to bed and be up and at your books bright and early to-morrow. Wash, cut the brother's hair and scrape his hide and I'll pay you for it. And say, brother, can you sing? If you can, we'll go out and have a time. I've got some peach brandy that will pull a tooth. Ain't that so, Wash? Hah, ain't it so? You bet it is. Don't want any? All right, sit down here now and Wash will fix you. Glad to meet you; been looking for you a long time. Thought you might get in yesterday, but you didn't. Well, I must go. Charge it to me, Wash."

The negro entertained Bryce with stories of his benefactor. He was the smartest lawyer in the county and

would have been in the legislature long ago had it not been for whisky. He had saved many a man's neck.

When the work was completed Bryce asked directions to the nearest steamboat landing, and the negro told him that the surest place to catch a boat was Smedley's Bend, about seven miles distant.

"By the way, have you anything to eat here?" Bryce asked.

He had brought his dinner but had nothing left. "Look and see," the hungry man requested. The barber took down a basket, stirred up a piece of paper that was in it, and said that there was nothing but a few scraps. "Well, give them to me. One who serves the Lord in out-of-the-way places is satisfied with the scraps that fall even from the poor man's table. Now tell me which road to take. Straight ahead? Thank you. Good night."

CHAPTER XVI.

The east was aglow by the time Bryce reached the landing. He found a negro asleep on a pile of corn sacks, aroused him and asked him when a boat was likely to pass down the river. The negro looked up, saw that his questioner was meanly dressed and resented the disturbance. Human nature is stronger in no man than it is in the negro. He is fond of smart sayings but they are brighter when uttered by a man of wealth. He may smile upon his own rags but he looks with contempt upon the rags of a white man.

"I want to know what time a boat going down the river is expected to land here," said Bryce.

The negro told him that a boat would land there whenever it got ready. Bryce called him an impudent scoundrel and the negro got up. He said that such a charge would snatch him out of a feather bed even at the drowsiest time of morning and that if Bryce did not apologize he would wallow him. Just then a white man came up and asked to be enlightened as to the cause of the trouble. Bryce told him, with several interruptions from the negro, and the white man replied: "That's nothing to fight

about, but you oughtn't come around here this time of morning waking people up. We have to work; we haven't time to go tramping through the country."

"I want work," Bryce rejoined, "and that's the reason I am here. I want to work my way to Nashville and I should like to know when you expect the first boat."

The man said that a boat would be along about noon to take on a load of corn. Bryce asked if there were any way by which he might earn something to eat, and the man, pointing to a shanty not far away, answered: "Go over there, split some wood, make a fire, and bring a bucket of water."

While he was splitting the wood the negro came up to superintend the work. He told Bryce he was not splitting the wood small enough, and commanded him to go to a spring quite a distance up the river, said that the water there was better; and by way of insult he added: "An' we'n you git through wid all dat you mout take my ole shoes an' gib 'em er lick er two wid de blackin' bresh, 'caze I sorter wants ter shine 'mong de ladies ter mor'."

"I hope some time to meet you when the circumstances may be different," Bryce replied.

"Yes, sah, we'n you'se in de penetenchy, an' I is one o' de bosses o' de job. Is dat it? Oh, you kain' tell whut gwine happen. You kin' 'spect most anything fum deze yere white tramps. Come, hurry up dar."

"You infamous scoundrel! If I were not afraid of having to stay here to explain I would knock you down with this axe."

"Wid my own axe at dat! I declar', de white tramps is a gittin so frisky deze days dat it takes er peart pusson ter keep up wid 'em. Hurry up dar."

"You black spawn of the devil!"

"Huh, dat's fine; say dat er gir. I kin use dat er gin deze niggers roun' yere, an' da'll think I'se flyin'. Gimmy suthin' else 'bout myse'f."

After breakfast Bryce lay upon the corn sacks, and had dozed off to sleep when the negro aroused him. "De boss say git up fum dar, an' go an' fetch er nuder bucket o' water. Tain' no hour o' de day fur er pusson ter come stretchin' hisse'f roun' yere. W'y, yander come de May Ann now. Huh, dat lady is er head o' time. Go on an' fetch dat water, ur I'll tell de cap'n not ter let you git on boa'd."

The little craft had landed by the time Bryce returned from the spring. It was the boat that had set him ashore at Campbell's Bend, and he was afraid that the captain might recognize him, but he did not. Bryce asked him if he might work his way to Nashville, and he replied: "Grab a hold there and help load that corn."

Down the river he went, and he stood near the jack-staff, and the deck hands were singing the same song

they had sung when he went up the stream. He was still a long distance from home, but he felt that he was safe. He wondered whether the brethren were searching for him, but he knew that after their fury had spent itself they would be cautious lest they might bring down upon their creed an inquiry too strong and searching. But would he be safe in Nashville? Might not their search gradually extend to that city? They knew not his name, knew not what business he had followed; they knew him not except as the husband of the Wives. He had told them that he had come from England. Then let them search for him in England. If Alma had only consented to go with him. By this time they could have been safe, happy in some hidden place. She was a fool to stay there among those bigots. Yes, he had frightened her with his suddenness. He ought to have spent days, weeks, months, if needs be, in converting her to a new faith: the faith of absolute love for him. Now that his fear was less intense, he could see her face, could hear her laughter in the rippling of the water at the bow of the boat.

They landed to take on more corn, and up the bank Bryce was forgetfully walking when the mate struck him with a clod: "Hurry up there, slouch! Hurry up there, snail! Where did we pick up such a thing us you, anyway? I'll leave you ashore the first thing you know."

Bryce staggered under the heavy sacks. "Hurry up there, slouch!"

"Don't you see, sir, that I am hurrying as fast as I can?"

"Don't talk back to me; I'll knock you into the river. Hurry up there, slouch!"

The sun went down, the deck hands sang their evening song. The air was cool. Bryce lay down near the furnace and dropped off to sleep. A kick aroused him. "Wood up here! Come, come! You are the laziest devil I ever saw. Knock you into the river the first thing you know!"

Again he lay down near the furnace when the boat swung round into the current, and this time he was permitted to sleep until daylight. He sat upon a box, to eat out of a tin pan his scrappy breakfast, and a negro, filthy of body and foul of mouth, sat beside him. That mud-executive, the mate, came along and told them to hurry up, that they were going to land a short distance below to take on a shipment of tobacco. "And mark me," he said to Bryce, "if you don't do better than you have been doing, I'll make you stay ashore."

"My dear sir, I have done the very best I could."

"Don't you dear sir me; I'll knock you heels over head into the river."

Bryce looked at the fellow and it flashed upon his mind

that he remembered him. Years before, just after having been admitted to the bar, the court appointed him to defend that fellow against a charge of manslaughter. Yes, and now he recalled the particulars of the case. The fellow was a deck hand and had killed a companion. And it was his brutality that had no doubt placed him in line for promotion.

Along toward noon the boat landed at a small town and a crowd of people, evidently the society of the place, came down to the wharf to bid a distinguished looking man adieu. Bryce recognized him as he came upon the gang plank; he was a Methodist bishop, hearty with many a "God bless you," stout with many a feast, resonant of voice, conscious of the weakness of others and of the strength of himself. A song arose as

the boat was shoved off, handkerchiefs fluttered, the bishop waved a benediction. The air above was too cutting, the air below was just right, the eminent passenger said, and for himself and his companion—a young man—chairs were brought forward and placed near the bow. Bryce hung about and heard the bishop and the young man talk of the scenery, of the bracing air which God had sent to the bishop, of the delightful day which God had given to the bishop, of the captain whom God had inspired to take the bishop free of charge. It was a self-importance born of the adoration of women, but with it there was kindliness instead of bigotry. The old gentleman had seen so little of trouble that he was still in love with the world which God had given him. To him the struggle for bread was a vague abstract; for him bread was baked in many a house and affectionate and reverential voices urged him to eat.

"My son," the bishop said to his companion, "kindness rules this life. A simple kindness of heart is a wisdom, while viciousness, though it may be possessed by a philosopher, is a stupid ignorance. In my mind a satirist is the most despicable creature that lives. And history teaches us that he dies abjectedly. Addison, holding until the last his gracious faculties, died a beautiful death; Dean Swift rotted at the top. That part of a man which tantalizes his fellow man, is soonest to decay. The sting

of a wasp dies last, but the sting of a man dies first and leaves him helpless, pitiable. And I charge you to remember these things for some day you may be a bishop."

The young man shook his head. "Not while Hartley is alive," he replied.

"You speak wisely, my son, for Hartley is becoming a power in this land, and deservedly so. He holds up an example of what a man may do by study and the cultivation of the virtue of unselfishness."

"Bishop, are you acquainted with Howard Bryce, the lawyer whom Hartley talks so much about?"

"I knew his father when he was state senator, and I have held Howard on my knee, but I cannot say that I know him now; years have passed since I have been thrown with him. Our roads diverged. He was wont to speak a sharp evil of his fellow man, I have been told."

"Yes, I have heard so. He is traveling in Europe now, I believe. Hartley says that he is one of the brightest and yet one of the most peculiar men he has ever known."

"I dare say," the old gentleman replied, "that at one time he was material for a bishop, that is, had he been properly directed. The air is rather chilly here. Suppose we go inside."

"What are you standing about here for?" the mate shouted at Bryce. "Get a move on you! There is

always something to do on board a boat. You'll lose your job as soon as we get to town, I'll tell you that. Don't stand there looking at me! Hand me that stick of wood, Steve; I'll knock him overboard. You'd better move on!"

The sun was down, the stars were out; and Bryce saw the lights of the city. Behind a wall of corn he stood, hiding from the mate. The deck hands were singing. And this was the end of his wild and lustful adventure. But was it the end? He might escape the wrath of old man Boyle, but could he escape the lash of conscience? Yes, he could; he could with humility sweep out Hartley's church, humble himself at the mourner's bench. But would not that be a trick, and did not conscience understand all trickery? He must shape some other course; but could he not in all sincerity beg of his conscience to forgive him? And suppose it refused? He could kill his conscience. But this he had already striven to do and had failed. Was he not, however, more afraid of physical punishment than of conscience-torture?

They were nearing the wharf; the song of the deck hands was hushed; they were ready to throw out the plank. The mate came along and swore at them. "Grab hold there!" he shouted at Bryce, and Bryce mused: "Why should he hate me? It must be the unconscious resentment of ingratitude, and if he were to learn the true cause of his brutality toward me, he would find that it

rests upon the fact that I have done him a service. The fact that he does not remember me makes no difference; the hatred is there though he may be ignorant of the cause."

When the boat landed Bryce shouldered a sack of corn, staggered up the levee with it, dropped it and ran away. The mate swore after him, but no attempt was made to bring him back. He dodged behind a shanty, the home of the old sailor who had picked the pictures on his arms. He was afraid that some acquaintance might recognize him. He remembered that hanging in his office closet was a hunting suit, and dressed in it he could safely go to his room. His course now lay through alleys and across vacant places. His office was in one of the principal streets, and an alley ran back of it. He had no key, and how was he to let himself in? He wished that the hour was later; his efforts to force an entrance might attract the police. Had he been a robber he might not have feared this, but he imagined that fate was seeking to expose him, and might not a policeman well serve as an agent of perverse fate? He stole down an alley, and stood under his own window. He wondered whether he had fastened the catch, and he tried the sash. Yes, he had; the sash could not be raised. He stole to the mouth of the alley and peeped up and down the street. No policeman was in sight. He returned to the window and,

with a stone, broke a pane of glass, quickly thrust his arm through, slipped the catch, raised the sash, and stepped inside. He fumbled about for a match; the tin safe was empty. He felt over the green table, opened the drawers; he turned toward the closet. He stepped upon a match. It snapped, blazed, and he grabbed at it, but the flame died. In the closet he found an old waistcoat, and in one of the pockets was a match. He lighted the gas. Fortunate that they had not shut it off. He put on the hunting suit and sat down to rest. There was everything undisturbed: his books covered with dust, his papers just as had left them. He heard a church bell. He knew the tone — the largest church in town; Hartley's church. His room was in a large building not far away, and he was acquainted with many of the tenants, among them a gossipping music teacher, but what difference could it make now if she should meet him in the hallway? To-morrow he must begin the answering of questions about his travels in Europe. The music teacher would want to know all about Italy; Hartley would demand an account of his visit to Westminster Abbey, and reporters might interview him upon the prospect of a war on the continent. In the street he escaped recognition; he climbed the stairs, walked down the hall. A door opened; the music teacher came out. "Well, I declare, if this ain't Mr. Bryce. Why, how do you do?

I am so glad to see you. And you have been gone away so long, haven't you? And I understand that you didn't write to a single soul. It was awfully mean of you not to let us know how you were enjoying yourself. Do come in. Mommer is here and would like so much to hear about your trip. Did you go to the Holy Land? Oh, you must tell mommer all about that. And you must have stood on the Mount of Olives. And did you see any olives? Please do come in. Well, won't you take breakfast with us in the morning? Why, you know mommer. Don't you remember how badly she had rheumatism? She is nearly well; and what do you think of that? Do you remember my bird? What do you think, a cat killed it. I just had to sit down and cry. Oh, how you have lost flesh. But I suppose that travel is awfully wearing."

At last he was in his room, with his door locked against the prattle of that woman. How different from the bright talk of Alma, of Rachel, of either of the Wives.

Bryce lighted his long German pipe and stretched himself upon the sofa. There were the portraits of his mother and his sister looking down upon him. He got up and turned out the light, but in the darkness came pictures that the light did not reveal. Again he lighted the gas He dozed off to sleep. A tap on the door aroused him. He opened the door and Hartley stood there. He grabbed Bryce by the shoulders and shook him. "Oh, my dear

boy," he cried, "you can't sneak home without my finding it out. There are music teachers in this neighborhood you know. But what is the matter with you, Howard? You don't look well. Here, let us sit down."

Bryce sat upon the sofa and motioned Hartley to take a rocking chair. "My dear Hartley I don't look well for the reason that I have on this suit of clothes. Got here all tired out and put it on at the prompting of a senseless whim, you know. How are you getting along? Tell me about yourself; tell me everything. Who is dead? Who is going to die, and worse, who is married?"

Hartley rocked himself, laughing. "You come back the same old Howard. I don't remember how many people have died since you left, I don't know how many are likely to die, but I know that I am married, and that instead of being worse than death, my wife is the blessing of my life. But let us not enter into a discussion. Tell me about your trip. No, not now, you are too tired for that. We will get down to it after awhile. I simply ran in to see you, to assure myself that you were well. Church was just out when I met the music teacher and she told me that you had returned."

"But don't go, Hartley. Please sit down; I don't want you to go. I find rest in your mere presence, an undeserved consolation in your voice. Don't leave me yet."

"My dear Howard, something is troubling you. What is it?"

"No, nothing is troubling me. I had fever in Italy and I am not well."

"But it wasn't a brain fever, was it, Howard?"

"What the devil—excuse me, my dear Hartley, but what put that into your head? No, it was just a malarial fever, and it has left we weak and irritable, but when I am strong again I am going to make an effort to be somebody. I shall read no more idle books; I am going to study. From where you sit can you see that my hair is turning gray?"

"No, Howard. Is it turning gray?"

"Yes, come closer."

The preacher moved his chair nearer the sofa. "Oh, I can see a few gray hairs, but that makes no difference. Gray hair is no sign of weakness. Our bishop has white hair and he is almost as strong as a lion."

"Yes, I came down on the boat with him—I mean that I was on a steamboat excursion with him some time ago, and I noticed then that his hair was white. Then you don't think that gray hairs on my head is a sign that I am going as Swift did, rotting at the top?"

"My dear boy, you are not well yet and I think you need a doctor."

"No, all I need is a little rest. But I can't afford to

rest long. I have no money and I have no income. I am tottering here on the experimental age of the present. Why should the past be so clear and the future so dark? Gibbon turned and the past was under his glance. He could look back almost into the sunrise of Roman civilization, but looking forward, he could not see as far as his eye lashes." He was silent, staring with expressionless eye at the nothing in the air, and after a time he added: "I owe Bentley a small debt and I am going to sell a part of my library to raise money enough to pay him."

"He won't demand that, Howard."

"But honor demands it, Hartley. Yes, I am going to rest and then I shall strive to make of myself what you desire to see me."

"You ought to marry some good woman, Howard."

"No, don't talk about marriage. My love is dead—I mean that I don't think I could love any one. I know all about beauty, innocence, tenderness; I know as much about women as anybody, and I would rather be in hell than to marry a woman I could not love aside from—I was going to say passion, but I'll let that pass. I can argue that marriage is a stupendous failure or that it is a quiet blessing."

"Howard, to hear you talk one might take you to be an old man."

"Yes, and having my experience one might think that

Methuselah at the time of his death was a youngster. And when I look at your fresh, blonde appearance, I can but think that you are a child, that I ought to take you by the hand and lead you along, and yet in truth I am

not even worthy to follow you. But I am going to follow you."

The preacher, slowly rocking himself, smiled upon his friend and Bryce, looking at him, saw the light of an unselfish heart. "Howard, gratitude, and not egotism,

prompts me to say that I hope so. But you will not be following me, but walking with me — for I shall walk but slowly — you will pass me. I once heard a man say that he was so happy that he was afraid that some evil might come upon him. And I thought that he must have done some evil, that he felt that his happiness was stolen, that sooner or later it would be demanded of him. But don't you want to go to bed? You must be tired."

"No, don't go away. Move your chair just a little closer. That's it." He stretched himself upon the sofa, took Hartley's hand and held it. He lay there with his eyes closed and, now that the light of his countenance was gone, the preacher marveled at the haggardness of his face. What could be the cause of his trouble? Why had he gone to Europe, and why should he return so wretched of body, so disturbed in mind? He thought of the time, years ago, when Bryce had helped him, when his nimble wit at play had thrown light upon the darkness of a dead tongue. Then he had felt proud of him, now he could but look upon him with pity.

Bryce fell asleep, still holding the preacher's hand. His grasp was feverish, and when Hartley gently released himself, the sleeping man's fingers nervously clutched at him. He spread a rug over him and softly he tip-toed to the door. He looked back, gazed a moment, sadly shook his head, stepped out, and closed the door.

CHAPTER XVII.

There passed many a weary day and threatening night; a month dragged by and still Bryce was not able to leave his room. The leading physician of the city had been in constant attendance upon him and had held consultations with other doctors; and the patient's condition had been pronounced hopeless; once they had thought that he was dead. In his delriuim he lived through an age of anguish, raved until it was feared he would die in a convulsion. At night, people passing along the street heard his frightening cries. When reason returned, feebly feeling its way back to him, he recognized Hartley, and sniffed the scent of flowers that had been placed on a table near him. And instantly he thought of something that old man Boyle had said: "The devil deadens our senses with a sweet perfume that he may better steal the soul." A fear that in his delerium he might have raved over Bolga seized upon him and shook him until again he was almost unconscious, but when he asked a question, Hartley held up his head and said: "Not a word, my dear boy. You are all right now but you must not talk. Just be patient a little longer."

Slowly he regained his strength, but the days were so weary and the nights were almost endless; but to learn that his wild words had meant nothing was a great relief to him. One day when he was able to walk about the room, Hartley brought the bishop to see him. "Do you think, sir, that I may rot at the top?" Bryce asked before he knew what he was saying. The bishop looked in astonishment at him.

"Why, my dear young man, what put that idea into your head?"

"I don't know, sir, unless it was that I dreamed of you saying that Swift rotted at the top."

"It is not a very elegant expression," the bishop replied, laughing, "but I have said so. Strange, though, that you should have dreamed it. But there is no accounting for our thoughts at waking hours, then why should we marvel at the vagaries of a dream? Do you remember sitting on my knee when you were a boy?"

"Yes; you wore a large silver watch that shut with a loud snap, and I remember hearing you say, 'what can a man give in exchange for his soul?' and I wondered if men were going about trying to exchange something for their souls."

"Yes, you do recall me. Your sister was older than you. I remember her; no one could forget her face. But there, I am sorry I spoke of her. Well, you are getting

along nicely, Brother Hartley tells me. Yes, and it will not be long until you will be about again. And when you are yourself, when you can reason and weigh evidence, why not think about our church? Pardon me, but you have lacked proper direction, and nothing so directs a man as the true church of the living God."

Bryce got out of his rocking chair and walked slowly up and down the room. "Bishop, you have faith. Where did you get it?"

"It was given to me."

"Ah, but why hasn't it been given also to me?"

"My son, God has given you the evidence and you accept it not."

"No, that is what I beg for; I want evidence, but there is none."

"Where is the bible?"

"Oh, that's what they all say. Your faith rests upon the bible; what does the bible rest upon? Faith is well enough, but simple faith is the reverse of reason; faith bats its eyes like an owl in the glare of a light. But then, no good can come from such an argument. I will say this to you, however: I will make an effort to come into your church. I should like to be a useful man, and if I am a free agent, why can I not become one? But here is something I can't understand: Within a man there is a constant see-sawing of good and bad intentions. Why

should that be? If the bad within me is stronger than the good, can I help it? If the good is unable to overthrow the bad, is it my fault?"

"I could preach a long sermon on the text you give me," said the bishop, "but I fear that it would be useless. You have given us your word that you are going to try to come into our church. That is all we ask of you; we will pray for the rest. But come, we have brought a carriage and are going to take you driving."

Through Bryce's mind there ran a constant surmise; day and night, awake or sleeping, he wondered whether the men of Bolga were searching for him. And what would they do if they should find him? Upon the ground of fatalism he rested his defense. What he had done, had to be done. This was well enough, but what should be the end? One day he went to the steamboat landing, when the May Ann had come down, and asked the captain if he had lately seen any of those peculiar people, the Bolgaites. The captain answered that he had occasionally seen some of those cranks but that he had paid no attention to them. Bryce asked him if any of them had ever taken passage on his boat, and he said that they had not. Bryce saw the mate but the fellow did not recognize him; it was evident that he, like the majority of the human family, estimated a man by his garb rather than by his face, that to change a man's clothes was to make a stranger of him.

A political campaign opened with the coming of spring. Bryce had regained his strength, and was resolved to take the "stump" for his party. He made a speech at a barbecue, and so completely did he catch the crowd that when the state convention met he was selected as a presidential elector. He traveled about, making speeches, but went not into the mountain district. He was termed an eagle orator, the man with a silver tongue. With one bound he had sprung past the plodders and was leaving them far behind. He had known that he could distance them, and had simply waited for the time to come. Hartley was delighted. One day he was on a train with Bryce, going toward a town in the lowlands of the state. "Howard, you are now making the people see your splendid talents. You will be governor after a while; you will be sent to congress, to the senate. Perhaps after all you were wise when you were resolved to wait. For so young a man to shove himself forward would not have looked right. But I was so eager to see you advance. I was talking to Bentley yesterday, and he said that you had made one of the brightest and most telling speeches he had ever heard. The bishop heard you day before yesterday, and he told me that you were unquestionably a great man; that you would make a broad mark in politics, but that you should be in the church preaching the gospel."

"The bishop is a big man," Bryce replied, "but he is not big enough to get away from his shop. I heard him preach not long ago, and he strove to reason with his people. That is a mistake. With reason you catch a reasoner here and there, but the people are caught by entertainment, by word-flights, by jolts, by unexpected utterances. Reason with the average man and you lead him to surmise what you are going to say, and then he loses respect for your intelligence. But pour out words upon him, dazzle him with pictures, and he thinks that he sees an inspiration."

Bryce had no money when the campaign closed, but clients came to him. His flatterers came back, and women smiled upon him. One day the bishop visited him at his office. He called him Howard. "I have seen you in church a number of times," said he, "and I have wondered if you were earnestly trying to get into the fold, striving to make up your mind. Is it true?"

"I have thought something about it, but my mind is not made up." The bishop moved in his chair as though he were impatient. "It is your fault," he said. "I saw you in the congregation, and I reasoned especially for you; I presented truths which you cannot deny; and now that you have made your influence so deeply felt, more than ever is it your duty to become one of us, to lead others by your example. You may not think that you

are to be held accountable for the frailties of other people, but you are. You are conscious of your strength, and yet you refuse to wield it. And on the day of judgment that neglect will be looked upon as a crime."

"Do you mean to tell me that I shall be punished simply because I cannot become a hypocrite? I cannot join your church because I cannot accept your doctrine. And you may say that I ought to accept it. But suppose I have no faith, what then? Bishop, there are in this world hundreds of religions that are just as plausible as yours, and their devotees wonder why all men do not accept them. You believe in a literal hell; I cannot. But I will admit that there have been times when I believed in a personal devil, but I was weak and frightened."

"And may you not be weak and frightened when your time comes to die?"

"Yes, that's true," Bryce admitted, and nervously he fumbled a pen that lay on the table. Why could he not be permitted to forget? He wondered if there might not be a future punishment. Strength told him no, but weakness told him yes. He wished that Hartley and the bishop would leave him alone. It flashed upon him that he was not safe, that old man Boyle might at any moment step into his office and assassinate him. The bishop noticed the effect that his words had taken and he repeated them. "When do we need the most moral strength? At the

time when death shall come. To this question there may be an uncertain side, but there is another side and it is absolutely safe."

"And you would have me join your church to escape punishment. That would be cowardice, a palpable trick."

"Well," said the bishop getting up to go, "I see that you are not quite ready yet. But do the best you can and I will pray for you."

Yes, he was in danger; he was living too close to Bolga. But he had not money enough to go far, and no matter whither he should go it would take him a long time to establish a practice. But why not marry a fortune and then go away? He shuddered at this but he accepted the suggestion. He knew a widow, older than himself, wrinkled indeed, but she had money. She would marry him for his name, for the prospect of becoming the wife of a governor.

He went out when the bishop was gone, and a strange looking man stared at him in the street. The man passed quickly on, but Bryce felt cold, and he thought of the fancied chill, running up and down the creek at the Witch Hole.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Three days passed and again the strange-looking man stared at Bryce in the street. This time he halted longer, and turned and looked back after he had passed on. Bryce cautiously followed him, kept him in view until he disappeared through the entrance to a wagon yard. It was evening and he walked about the neighborhood until dark, and then he went to the manager of the wagon yard, described the man and requested information concerning him. The manager, a blunt fellow, said that he knew nothing about him, and cared less so long as he paid his bills. "Here he comes now and can speak for himself," he added. Bryce turned to leave, but the man called after him. "Do you want me?" he asked.

"I don't know," Bryce answered, halting, "But perhaps you can give me the information I want," he added, slowly approaching the man. "Some one has told me that you are from the iron lands near Birmingham. I have lost sight of a client of mine, and have heard that he went down into that part of the country. His name is Featherstone."

"I never was in that part of the country, sir; I live

down the river. This is Mr. Bryce, ain't it? I heard you speak not long ago, and I 'lowed to myself that you were the man when I saw you a time or two in the street."

It was simply a frightening shadow and was gone. But how long was this dread to last? Must he continue to shy like a horse, constantly look for something to scare him? The fault lay with his nerves; he was smoking too much; he would give up tobacco. A week passed, his nerves were worse; again he had been frightened. He went to his room and lighted his German pipe. Tobacco, beneficent plant, soothed his mind and sent off his thoughts in an easy flow. He had been foolish. He was in no danger. Those bigots might rave among themselves, but they were afraid of the light of a city. They dared not molest him; to murder him would bring ruin upon them; an appeal to the law would expose their creed. Yes, he was safe; he would not marry that wrinkled woman. But would not old Boyle hire a wretch to stab him? His pipe was out and his fears had returned. He filled it and lighted it, but the fears remained.

During the day when he was in court, powerful before a jury, he stood in strong defiance, but alone in his office or in his room, he was a coward. One evening while he was in a nervous meditation, he heard Hartley's foot-steps in the hall. He unlocked the door and cried, "Come in; you don't know how glad I am to see you. Take that arm

chair. How are you, anyway? What, wearing gloves? Is that carrying out the doctrine of humility?"

Hartley laughed, "It is my wife's whim," he replied. "She says that as I am the pastor of a fashionable congregation, to dress becomingly is one of my duties. And I agree with her; but mark me, if I find that gloves give offence to my fellow man, I will take them off and cast them from me. Howard, you are making a great name."

"Well, I am not sliding backward, at any rate. By the way, you have often advised me to marry some good woman. Well, that is exactly what I am going to do."

"Good! Now you are in the right direction. May I ask the name of the lady?"

"The Widow Buckney."

"What! You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do; we are engaged."

"Why, she is much older than you."

"That's true."

"But do you love her?"

"Oh, that's another question. But to be frank, I do not love her. She is wrinkled, and a man may venerate a wrinkle but he can't love it. However, there is one charm about her: she has money."

"Howard, you grieve me. Why should you marry her for money when you will soon have plenty of your own? Don't marry her. You cannot afford it."

"But, my dear fellow, I have given her my word and there stands honor, commanding me. I carp upon points of honor. I suppose that I am the most honorable wretch that ever lived. Yes, sir, I shall take that withered lady to my heart and softly whisper, 'my own, you are very dear to me. Give me your money.'"

The preacher took off his gloves and threw them into the grate. "What's that for?" Bryce asked.

"They have given me offence by causing you to be flippant with me. You saw in them an evidence of worldliness, and you thought to be more worldly than I. Howard, I don't know what to say. I thought that I was getting at a complete understanding of you, but you have thrown me farther off than ever. Do you know that woman well? Have you heard that her character is not good?"

"Why should I have heard such a thing, Hartley? I don't belong to the church. So her character is not good. But has any aspersion been cast upon her money? I care nothing for her name in society. In strictest confidence, let me tell you something. I am going to marry her and leave here. I am going, well, say to Australia. And she is simply the ship that is to take me over."

"Howard, what in the world could have prompted such a move?"

"Nothing in the world, but something out of it,"

For a long time they sat in silence. The preacher arose to go. "I must bid you good-bye," he said.

"Going out of town. Hartley?"

"No, but I must bid you good-bye, for when I meet you again I shall not know you. Listen to me. I have been devoted to you. When others have spoken against you, I have stood in your defense. There was something about you that I could not understand, but I believed that your heart was right. But now I know that your heart is black. You are a scoundrel."

Bryce sprang to his feet. "By God, you shan't talk to me this way!"

"Be quiet!" the preacher commanded with a motion of his hand. "I am in your own house, but I stand here to tell you the truth. You are a scoundrel!"

Bryce pointed toward the door. The preacher bowed and withdrew. Bryce ran to the door. "Come back, Hartley!" he cried. "Yes, I am a scoundrel. Come back and I will tell you why."

The preacher did not look around, and slowly he walked down the stairs.

Bryce sat down to think. He lighted his pipe, but it went out. The loss of that man's friendship wrung him. But he must not lose it. He would write to him, beg for forgiveness. He grabbed up a pen and covered sheet after sheet, but tore them to pieces. Evening came; the church bells rang for prayer meeting. He listened to the bell of Hartley's church. "Scoun-scoundrel!" it said; "scoun-scoundrel!"

He would go to prayer meeting. He went, and took a seat far in front, among the old men and old women who had come to beg of God to bless their fading lives. Hartley looked not at Bryce, and when the services were ended he walked past him without speaking. Bryce returned home angry, resentful. He would send Hartley a letter to sting him as with a thousand nettles. "Most righteous one," he began, "when were you appointed to bring men to judgment? I thought that you were a strong and unselfish man, but you have shown me that you have the petulance of a vanity-stricken clown, and the weakness of a fool. You called me a scoundrel and I

begged of you to forgive me, to forgive me for being the scoundrel that you had called me. You heeded me not. I went to your church to pray with you, and you treated me with contempt. And yet you knelt there and prayed to Him who died that men might be forgiven. I may be a scoundrel, but I am not a bigot." He tore the paper to pieces. "It would be foolish to send it to him," he said. "Why should I care? I can get along without his friendship. He has never benefited me. There was simply a sentiment between us, and a puff of wind has blown it away."

At early morning he went to his office and was writing when some one spoke his name. He looked up; Hartley stood in the door. "Howard, may I come in?"

"Yes, sit down."

"Not until you say that you forgive me."

"You have committed no offence and are in no need of forgiveness. You were there to tell truth and you told it."

"Howard, don't bring back my thoughtless words and sting me with them."

He sat down and a silence in which there was embarrassment fell between them. "Last night I could not sleep for thinking of you," the preacher said. "I could see your sad face appealing to me and I was wretched. I came down town and stood at your door, but I was afraid to knock lest in your just resentment you might

truth upon me; and so I went home again, but I could not sleep."

With his old air of affection Bryce got up and put his hand on Hartley's shoulder. "My dear fellow, don't think about it. I said enough to provoke you and I beg your pardon; you must not beg mine."

"Howard, you have a noble heart."

Bryce smiled: "There is but one noble trait about me" he said, "and that is my friendship for you."

"You must not talk that way," the preacher replied, "you make me ashamed of myself. Now let me set myself aright. I have heard idle talk about that widow, but as to whether or not her character is bad I cannot say. It was contemptible of me to speak of her as I did."

"Don't let it worry you, my dear boy; put it out of your mind. I will investigate her character and if it is not straight, I will not marry her. When I engaged myself to her it was of course with the implied understanding that she was all right. I can't afford to let her soil my name."

"No, for yours is an honorable name, Howard." And after a moment's silence he added: "Can you take dinner with us to-morrow?"

"I'm afraid not. I may be called out of town."

"I have a number of times asked you to my house and

you have always declined. Is it because you don't care to meet my wife?"

"It might be—it is. She expects too much of me and I don't wish to disappoint her."

"You are the most whimsical man in the world. It is true that she has heard a great deal of you, but I am not afraid of her being disappointed."

"Wait until I marry some good woman and then I shall come with my wife."

"All right, since you enforce your own conditions, but I wish you could be with us to-morrow. Well, I must get back home. I haven't eaten breakfast yet."

"And did you come off down here without your breakfast, and merely to ask me to forgive you? Had you been one of the virgins, you would have been one of the foolish. You might have known that I held no resentment against you."

Along toward noon a client, the representative of a railway, came in and paid Bryce a large fee, and when he had taken the check to a bank, he turned away, musing: "Don't think I can marry that widow. I don't need her money and God knows I don't want her. But suppose she sues me. I can tell her that I have found a bad flaw in her name and that if she goes to court it can but result badly for her. Everything is coming my way and I can't

afford to leave here; and why should I leave? The danger is gone."

When he returned to the office he found a rich client waiting for him, and before evening another one came. His railway case was a good advertisement.

On the following Sunday he went to Hartley's church and dropped a thousand dollars into the contribution box. His generosity was discovered and was whispered about the congregation, for at no place does a gift win so quick a reputation as at a church. As he was going out, a woman in a faded gown blocked the way. A deacon frowned upon her and pleasantly smiled upon Bryce.

CHAPTER XIX.

The summer was gone, the weather was growing cold. Many a day had passed since Bryce had received a scare. One day he talked with a man who had just passed through the village of Bolga. It was a peculiar place, the man said. He could learn nothing with regard to the affairs of the people, but they appeared to be contented.

Yes, they had forgotten Bryce and were praying for the true Prophet to come. He would have liked to ask the man if he had seen the Wives, but caution restrained him.

One evening he was busy in his office, preparing an important case, when Hartley appeared at the door. "Come in; I am never too busy to see you. There is your chair always waiting for you. I am really glad you came, for I am tired of this thing."

"Howard, you told me yesterday that you were about ready to join my church, that you thought you had experienced a change of heart."

"Yes, I told you that, and I am now ready."

"Thank God for those words. I have prayed earnestly for you, always believing that my prayer would be answered, and now it is answered."

"Yes, Hartley, I think it is. I believe that I have experienced a change of heart. A peacefulness has come to me, and I know that this is a change. I used to fear that some evil were about to come upon me, but that fear is gone. I have hanging there in the closet an old vest that I want to burn in your presence. It is a relic of the days of my wickedness, and I want you to see me destroy it, but I must request you to ask no question concerning it."

He went to the closet, struck a match and looked in. "That's strange," he said. "Now, I wonder what became of that thing. I wonder if that office boy could have taken it. I have had him but a short time and he already assumes to disobey me. That's a strange thing. I saw it here yesterday and was going to burn it then, but thought that I would wait until I could have you with me; wanted to make a sort of ceremony of it. Well," he added, resuming his seat, "if that boy has taken it away I will make him bring it back. Hartley, you remember that widow?"

"Yes; are you going to marry her?"

"No; she's crooked. Oh, she was rather dramatic when I broke the engagement, but I put the case very plainly to her, gave her to understand that a fight in court would ruin her, and she was angry when I left her, but was wise enough to know that silence was her best course.

But I *am* going to marry. Are you acquainted with Miss Laura Neil?"

"Yes, and she is a charming girl."

"We are engaged. I don't think that she is devoted to me, but we have found that we are companions and that is all I can ask. There was a time when I should have insisted upon absolute love, but that time is forever dead. I once loved a woman, and how deeply I did not know until she was beyond my reach. She thought that she was my wife."

"Thought so? Why, what do you mean?"

"Hartley, if Miss Neil knew my life, she would die rather than marry me. I have turned my back upon an awful sin, and I pray God to blot it from my memory. Look here." He took off his coat and rolled up his shirt sleeve. "See these pictures, see those names? There is the story of a crime darker—what are you doing

there?" The office boy was peeping in at the door. "Say, there, did you take an old vest out of that closet?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I don't think I want you any longer. Come round to-morrow morning and I'll pay you off. Go on now."

He rolled down his sleeve. "Some time I will tell you all about it, Hartley."

"And I can wait patiently, Howard, for I know that you have shown me the mark of an indiscretion rather than the record of a crime."

Bryce went to the door, which the boy had left partly open. "Why, the ground is covered with snow," he said. "Winter is here sure enough. I'll put on some more coal."

"Not on my account," Hartley remarked, "for I am going now."

"Wait a little longer," Bryce replied, turning from the door and taking up the coal scuttle. "That boy hasn't left any coal," he added. "Wait until I step back and get some." He went out and when he returned with the coal he said: "The wind comes sweeping down the river. I remember that when I was a boy, and with the odd fancies of a boy, I once stood in winter at the wharf, startled at the thought that the cold wind was the passing breath of men killed in battle. What are you smiling at, Hartley? Is the idea humorous?"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of your cold wind fancy, but of your attempt to make yourself out a mysterious criminal. Why, no man could be more generous than you and I am sure that no man is more honorable."

Having mended the fire, Bryce resumed his seat. "Generosity," said he, "is but an impressive carelessness; we possess something, we care nothing for it, being too much like an animal to estimate it properly, and we give it away. And honor is a sort of pretense which a man must keep up among men, but which he may drop among women."

"You are getting into one of your moods," the preacher replied. "I thought that you had put aside all cynicism. You know that a man, honorable toward man, is honorable toward woman."

"My dear fellow, I know nothing of the sort. Don't honorable men steal from women?"

"No, damnable men do."

"Oh, but among men they are honorable. Boys are taught to be honorable and girls are taught to be virtuous. And the boy can be honorable without being virtuous. So therein lies the social story of this life. But don't look at me that way."

"You said that you were ready to join my church, that you had experienced a new birth, a change of heart."

"Yes, that's true enough; but the new life has not

robbed me of a proper estimate of the old. But we'll let it go. How is your boy?"

"Delightful! Why don't you come out and see him?"

"I will; I will come with my wife. Must you go? Oh, I forgot that you must preach to-morrow."

The preacher stood at the door, holding Bryce's hand. "Do not cease to pray," he said.

"For myself?" Bryce asked, laughing.

"Yes."

"But that would be selfishness. Let me pray for your boy, and boys that are snugged by their mothers away up the river in the mountains where the cold wind gathers its force. I must still have my quiet fun with you," he laughed. "Good night."

Bryce sat down and again took up his law case. He reminded himself of a boy striving to untangle a fishing line; there were kinks here and kinks there, and when one was straightened, another was made. He looked at his watch; half past eleven. He put away his papers; he would not work so near the edge of Sunday; he was going to be religious. He sat there, smoking, musing. The new year was not far off. The influence of its new hopes could be felt; its whisperings were in the air, in the snow that was drifting. He remembered a new year when he had been weak and nervous, afraid of strange-looking men, of shadows; now he was strong, saw no shadows,

could smile at a substance. Midnight was striking; the hour was passed on from one bell to another, up the river, down the river. He put out the gas and stood at the door, looking back. The fire was blazing and shadows were dancing, on the ceiling, on the green table, among his law books. He locked the door, tried it to see if it were secure, and turned down the street toward his room. Snow was falling fast. A carriage glided by, noiseless, a black phantom. Just as he had passed an alley, some one spoke his name and stepped in front of him—his office boy. He asked the boy what he wanted. He said that he would like to ask him a question. "Well." But he did not ask it; he stood there, shifting about. Bryce thought that he heard a muffled step. He turned, something struck him and felled him to the ground.

* * * * * *

Hours must have passed. He could not gather his thoughts; he was sensible of but two things, that he was numb from head to foot and that he was moving along. He strove to cry out, but could not; he was bound and gagged. Gradually his senses came back to him. He was lying on his back with a blanket thrown over him. He raised up; the snow spat in his face. A dog barked; he heard the loud creak of a corn crib door—he knew that a farmer was feeding his stock, that it was day. The road grew rougher and the wagon jolted. Daylight came "Got

a dead man in there?" some one asked, riding along by the side of the wagon.

"No," a voice answered. "We are taking a horse thief back to the mountains."

"Good, and I hope you will treat him all right when you get him there. Country's getting pretty thick with them lately. Man in my neighborhood had a fine horse stolen night before last, and I shouldn't wonder but this is the very chap. Suppose you drive by with me."

"We know that this is not the man. He fled straight from the mountains, and we followed so close that he had no time to turn aside to steal another horse."

"What have you got that stick in his mouth for?"

"To keep him from blaspheming the name of the Lord."

"You ought to stop right here and hang him. How far have you got to go?"

"A very long distance. So you turn off here? Good morning."

Bryce, raising up, saw two men on a seat in front of him, and just behind them in the bottom of the wagon a boy was asleep on the straw. On Bryce's breast lay something that was not a part of the blanket — it was the waistcoat that had hung in his closet. He strove to sit up, but, stiffened and numb, it was some time before he succeeded. The country was growing wilder,

and it was evident that they were taking the loneliest way.

One of the men looked around. "Ha! our patient is sitting up. But we must warn him not to exert himself. Mister — we don't know your other name — I will take that thing out of your mouth, for it is not our instructions nor our desire to visit petty punishments upon you, but I must warn you that if you cry out or talk to any one whom we may chance to meet, that I shall be compelled to cut your throat."

Bryce nodded and the man came back and took away the gag. "I will keep you company," he said. "Turn to the right there, Brother Furgerson. Mister, it has been a long time since you left us, two years or more."

"Mr. Hallett, I remember you, and I must beg of you not to twit me. To torture a fellow creature is not the province of a godly man."

"Mister, that is true, nor shall I attempt it. We were not instructed by the Council to torture you. You will notice that we have cut our hair. And I wish to tell you that it was a dispensation of the Council. It was our religious duty not to attract attention. Ah, I have looked long and wearily for you. When you first left us we knew not which way to turn. It was remembered that you had said that you were from Devonshire, England. We were simple, and I was sent thither. Yes, we sold

all our linen to get money enough for the journey. I trod on many an acre of that country, and returned weary and discouraged. Then we sent men to different towns in this state. One of them heard you make a great speech. He was almost certain that you were the man, but we were instructed to be absolute in our knowledge of you, to see those pictures on your arms. The time was long but it came. Our little son went to your office to serve you. But you are a wise man; you know it all."

"Yes, and I know another thing, Mr. Hallett; I know that my disappearance will cause a great sensation."

"Yes, it did cause one, something more than two years ago."

"And it will result in the breaking up of your community, Mr. Hallett."

"Mister, you are a lawyer. Did you ever know a man to be punished for killing the destroyer of his home? A daughter is ruined; the law that is not written justifies the vengeance of the father. You cannot threaten us into mercy, and I advise you to employ some other force."

The man on the wagon seat did not look round. The boy was still asleep. "I am willing to be tried by the written law," Bryce replied.

"Mister, it is kind of you to be so pliant, but we are asking no concession."

"Will you please untie my hands?"

"Mercy might yield, but justice says no, and justice should be stronger than mercy."

"I don't suppose that I have a right to ask for anything."

"No, you should not even ask God to forgive you. That would be a mockery, and to mock God is to run toward eternal punishment."

"Of all the beings that ever lived, I am the most miserable," Bryce groaned. "I am the most inhuman of all wretches; I am beyond forgiveness."

"That is for the Council to determine."

This gave Bryce a hope. It was for the Council to determine, and had he not seen that Council ecstatic under the influence of his words? He would plead with them, tell them that the devil had tempted him out of hatred of the chosen people, that he had fallen and that he implored them not indeed to spare his life, but to intercede for his soul. This would prove to them that he still believed in their faith, and scorning to plead simply for his life would stimulate a respect for him. He lay down again and strove to picture the newspaper head lines announcing his mysterious disappearance. Reporters would interview Hartley and sentimentalities would be gushed over Miss Neil. Detectives would be sent out, but would they think of going to Bolga? And suppose they did—might it not be too late? The chosen people would dare

to kill him, for enraged fanaticism looks upon blood as a sweet cordial; but could they resist his pleading? They could not. Again he sat up and looked about him. No fences, no houses within sight.

"How far are we from the city, Mr. Hallett?" he asked.

"Our company lengthens or shortens a distance," he answered.

"I thought that you were not going to twit me."

"Pardon me. I don't know how far we are."

"How long will it take us to reach Bolga?"

"We should be there by the end of the fourth day."

"So long as that?"

"Your impatience to reach the village is peculiar."

"And a desire to remain here, tied hand and foot, would be more peculiar. Tell me about Benjamin."

He looked away as he said this; he was afraid to hear.

"Benjamin," said Hallett, "is well, and he often speaks of you."

"No doubt. But was he badly hurt?"

"Yes, and we thought that he should die. His countenance is much changed."

"It has grown graver, I suppose."

"There is a scar on his forehead," Hallett replied.

"What time that night did they find him?"

"They found him not at night, but at morning."

"Wasn't the alarm given that night?"

"We knew nothing until morning."

"Didn't Alma go to her father's house?"

"She went to the house of the Prophet, to her own room, to weep there. The other wives heard her and sought to comfort her, but she begged of them to go away, and they left her alone, but she came out and started toward the woods, and they stopped her and thinking that she had been bereft of her reason, they worked with her until morning. Then some one told the Councilman Boyle, and when he came she told him all about you."

"Mr. Hallett, I wish I had died that night."

"Mister, I wish you had died ere you were born."

"Let me tell you, Mr. Hallett, that the devil tempted me."

"To do what? To come among us or to go away?"

"To go away He was afraid of the Saviour of mankind."

Hallett touched Bryce's neck and then touched the handle of a knife. "I cannot control your thoughts," said he, "but there are words that you must not utter."

"Pardon me if I have wounded you."

"You have not wounded me; you offend God, and if I do not cut your throat when you next offend Him, I shall offend Him also. Turn to the left, Brother Furgerson,

and let us stop at the creek where we may get water for breakfast."

The boy awoke, but without looking at Bryce, climbed upon the seat with the man and rode on in silence.

"Is that your son?" Bryce asked.

"No, the son of Councilman Blake."

"And I used to teach him at school. I ought to have known him."

"We made him look older with the sap stewed out of roots. You taught him well; he is a smart boy."

The road was rough and they bumped along in silence. Snow had ceased to fall; the air was warmer and seemed to be coming up the river, but the clouds were still dark. They halted at the creek, a wild looking place, and Furgerson got out to water the horses.

"I will untie your hands and let you eat breakfast," Hallett said to Bryce.

"I thank you."

When his hands had been untied Bryce asked if he might stand up, and Hallett granted him that privilege. Within a few hours what a change had come upon the world, Bryce thought, as he stood there, looking at the hills far away. But he refused to brood over his condition; he needed his strength for defense.

"We are ready to go, and you have eaten nothing," Hallett remarked. "Hold out your hands; I must tie you."

"I pledge you my word and honor as a gentleman that I will not try to escape."

"As a what? A gentleman? But I suppose you *are* a gentleman as the world knows one. Hold out your hands. Now you are more of a gentleman," he added, when he had tied the rope. "Yes, quite a harmless gentleman."

"Mr. Hallett, you are sarcastic enough for a United States judge."

"But too much so for a gentleman, I fear. Let me see what time it is by your watch. Thank you. Brother Furgerson, we are going to have rain."

"Yes, I think so," Furgerson replied; "but if we push onward we may sleep in a house to-night."

"Will you also let me sleep in the house?" Bryce asked.

"Oh, yes," Hallett answered. "There is one house on the road wherein we may stop for the night, but only one."

"Why only one?"

"Because we may stop there, and the man of the place will say nothing of having entertained us. You may want to know why. And I can tell you that the man has led an adventurous life; that he is aware of our knowledge of it, and would not run the risk of having the law reach back after him."

Far ahead the sky was bordered with a blacker rim, and by noon they were in a sifting rain. Continuously Bryce strove to fight off the sharpest sense of his trouble, but in ceaseless vibration it came back to strike him. Over our gravest misfortunes we do not brood with words, but with pictures; and Bryce saw the excitement that his disappearance would cause, the anxiety of Hartley, the distress of Miss Neil; but these were merely the dimmest of etchings, the drawings of an idle moment in comparison with one scene—the end of it all. If it were to be determined that he should die, what form of death would they prescribe? He saw himself hanging from the tree at the well, saw himself thrown headlong from the cliff whereon he and Silvia had stood, pictured himself in a flame at a stake in front of the Temple, on the spot where The Age of Reason had been burned. But with a constant batting of his inner eye, he strove to blur these scenes. He would hoard his fancies as though they were the fibres of a vital force, for when the time of his trial should come, those mind essences must vivify his sorrow and his humility, must move those grave old men to pity.

Still wilder the country grew and in this there was to Bryce a sort of hopelessness; it destroyed the possibility of rescue. But there had been no such possibility, for several days must pass before his disappearance should

begin to excite alarm. No, there was no hope save in the power of his own words.

They passed an abandoned coal mine. Once there had been a bloody fight at this place—between the miners, and mine owners who had attempted to introduce convict labor, and now from a tree flapped the tattered remains of a sheriff hanged in effigy. To Bryce's mind this was a scare-crow and he brooded over it.

"Let us stop here and eat our dinner," said Hallett.

"Can't we go on just a little further?" Bryce asked.

"Mister, I am pleased to see you anxious to be nearer the village."

"It is not that. I want to get away from that infernal thing hanging there."

"Brother Furgerson, there is no water further on. Let us stop here. Mister, I will untie your hands."

When Furgerson announced that the horses were

done eating, Hallett commanded: "Give me your hands."

"Can't you leave the rope off just a little longer?" Bryce pleaded. "Man, you don't know what an outrage you are committing in using me this way. The people of this state look upon me as their next governor."

"Ah, and if elected you will have an opportunity to pardon your own crimes. Few men have been so fortunate. Hold out your hands."

"That cord is cutting my ankles in two."

"But still," Hallett replied, "it is not so sharp as the cord that has cut hearts in two."

"Mr. Hallett, the noblest quality of man is mercy."

"Mister, the most godly quality of man is justice."

"You so aptly set forth the principles of your creed that it is a wonder you had not been selected as a member of the Council."

"This would be a compliment were it not meant in contempt. Among my people I talk but little, I think; but with you I need not think, I can talk."

"I wonder, Mr. Hallett, that I had not become better acquainted with you."

"And I grieve, Mister, that we were all forced into so intimate an acquaintance with you."

Bryce was silent, brooding over the flapping effigy. Evening was coming on; they passed a buzzard roost.

"Those birds," said Hallett, "will eat a dead dog, but they are fonder of the carcass of a man."

"Yes," Bryce replied, "for I suppose they have a creed."

Hallett opened his coat, showed the handle of his knife; and they drove on in silence. Night came; they saw a light, heard the barking of dogs. "We are going to stop at that house," said Hallett, "and we are going to permit you to sit by the fire, but if you contradict anything I say I must cut your throat."

"But can you say anything that is not true?'

"Mister, religion is for the ultimate good of all men, and a lie told for religion finds its way to heaven as a truth. Brother Furgerson, stop the wagon here, and the Mister and I will get out. You and our son put up the horses, and then come to the house."

A man stood in a doorway, scolding his dogs. "Got back, have you?" he said when the light fell upon Hallett. "Long time in comin', but I reckon you are all right. Step in. Got a good fire for you, but, Nan," he added, speaking to a lank woman, "reckon you better fetch a little more wood. Sorter have to drag your friend along. What's the trouble with him? Got him tied, eh? Well, set him down here."

Bryce was acquainted with the host — Mr. Tuck Benson. "What has he been doin'?" Benson asked.

"Stealing horses," Hallett replied.

"That so? Well, then, what's the use in takin' him any furder; why not hang him right here? I've got a good rope back thar' under the bed, and as the weather is a little bad we can hang him in here from one of these here beams. What do you say?"

"No, I'll take him on. Don't you remember him? He stood guard over you one day."

"Yes, sir, he's the man. Say, let me slip that rope around him, will you? I wouldn't trust him three feet, and if he gits away from you he'll go right straight and tell the gover'ment that I used to make whisky. It don't make no difference to him even if I have give up whisky an' come away off down here; a hoss thief will do anything. If you don't want to hang him stand him out thar an' let me take a crack at him with my fuzee. No? Wall, now be shore that you take good kere o' him. Don't want no gover'ment fellers a comin' on me at this late day. Put the wood on the fire, Nan. Look thar! we've got a hoss thief."

The woman dropped the wood and started back. "That's all right, Nan; he's tied. Stir about now an' git us all a bite to eat. Two mo' fellers to come."

Furgerson and the boy came in, and Bryce, speaking to the youngster said: "I owe you about three dollars. When I told you to come around to-morrow so that I

might pay you, I did not think that the day following was Sunday. I have money in my pocket. Get it out."

The boy paid no attention to him, did not look at him. The woman stepped in between Bryce and the boy, raked out a bed of coals, threw on slices of bacon and then busied herself with arranging the table.

"Come, all hands," said Benson when his wife with a long-fork began to take up the bacon. "Jest fall to now an' devour what's set before you. I don't mean you," he added, nodding at Bryce. "No hoss thief kin sit down at my table with me. Nan, give him something on a tin plate. Ontie his hands, Cap'n. If he tries to git away I'll kill him befo' he gits to the do'."

After supper Mr. Benson sought to entertain his guests. He had slipped through many a dangerous place, and several times the revenue men had captured him. Once they were about to hang him to a tree, and for the only time in his life he got down to what he termed solid praying.

"An' I tell him that it was the prar that saved him," said the woman.

"That mout be," Benson replied, "but I rather think it was Alf an' them other fellers that come a crawlin' down the creek. But atter all, if it is intended fur a man to be hung he's goin' that way, an' that's all thar' is to it. I'm putty much of a Hard Shell Baptist. Whut's yo' belief, Cap'n?" he asked, nodding at Hallett.

"I believe in God," Hallett answered.

"Yes, that's nachul, but in whut sort of a dose do you swollow yo' religion? Do you believe in baptisin' by sousin' or by jest sorter dabbin' water on a feller?"

"I know nothing of baptising, for such trickery appeals not to me. Well, make your arrangements for the night, for we are tired and desire to lie down. You have but one bed, I notice."

"One bed in this room an' one in the little shed room a j'inin'. You fellers may have this room. The do' twixt this an' the shed room is fastened by a heavy bar on yon side, an' one of you kin lay down in front of this here do' that goes out, to keep the hoss thief frum gittin' away."

"Mister," said Hallett to Bryce, "you may sleep in the bed. I will lie down by the door, Brother Furgerson will lie under the window and our son will sleep in front of the fire."

"I thank you, sir," said Bryce, "but will you untie me so that I may sleep?"

"Mister, we may tie a man's hands and feet but we cannot bind him so fast that he may not slip into slumber. You need remove nothing. Lie down on the bed."

Bryce stretched himself upon the feather bed, and although his wrists and ankles pained him, swelling and throbbing, he soon fell asleep. It must have been midnight when the pain awoke him. The fire was low, the

room was almost dark. He raised up and looked about the room. The men and the boy were asleep. His hands were not tied behind him, and he turned over on his breast and with his teeth began to tug at the knot. He thought of cabinet tricksters who could untie themselves in a moment and he wished that he had taken a lesson of them. He heard one of the men turn over and he lay still, listening. All was silent and again he began to gnaw the rope. An hour must have passed—but his hands were free. And now, after rubbing his wrists, he began cautiously to work at the rope that bound his ankles. But the knot was so hard that he could do nothing. So, after all, he must give up. He straightened himself out with a groan. Suddenly he thrust his fingers into his waistcoat pocket and took out a small knife. It was a mere toy but it was big enough. He cut the rope and for a few moments. he lay there, rubbing his swollen ankles. Now what? To get out through the window or the door was impossible. Perhaps he could make his way through the roof. He knew that nails were sometimes so scarce in the back woods that clap-boards were often held in place by poles laid along the roof. He stood on the bed and could easily reach a cross-beam. He climbed upon it, he moved hard against the roof. The boards yielded. He worked until he got his hand through, and after that it took but a short time to make

an opening large enough to admit his body. He got his head and his arms through the opening. One foot was off the beam. Something touched his leg. He hung there, motionless. His heart had almost ceased to beat.

"Mister, has the devil tempted you again?" It was Hallett. "Come back or I'll stab you. Easy now; put your foot on the beam. That's it. Now you are all right. Brother Furgerson, give me that other rope."

CHAPTER XX.

The journey was resumed at early morning. A dark mist lay low to the earth, the air was cold, motionless; and when the team was stopped midway a hill to blow, Bryce looked up at a dead tree and wished that it might fall upon him. Not again did he ask them to untie his hands, for he felt that he had thrust himself beyond the province of a privilege. How earnestly Benson had begged for permission to kill him, when he saw the hole that had been made in his roof, and how gravely had the woman demanded the right to scald him when she found that by exposing her best bed to the weather he had abused her hospitality.

Hallett sat beside Bryce. "When I am brought to trial," said the prisoner, "I suppose you will tell the Council that I tried to get away."

"I shall tell them nothing; they know enough. It was but natural that you should try to get away."

"I am glad, Mr. Hallett, that you look at it in so humane a light."

"You may express it that way if you choose, but you might simply have reminded me that I excused the dog for running from the broom handle."

"Mr. Hallett, did you ever think that the cruelest creature in this life is man?"

"Yes, and it has been proved to me that his victim is woman."

"That may be true, but man's cruelty to woman is not exercised alone for the sake of cruelty; he has another motive and cruelty may be the result."

"Mister, a gentleman might put it that way to excuse himself, but God has another estimate. Let them pull ahead now, Brother Furgerson. Mister, it may not be a cheering opinion, but I will tell you that at the present rate of travel we may reach the village by to-morrow night."

"Mr. Hallett, almost any prospect is better than this certainty. I would rather die than to remain much longer tied like a calf hauled to market. I don't see how I could get away if you were to untie my feet."

"And I don't see, Mister, how you can get away if I keep them tied."

Bryce mused that by this time there must be spreading an anxiety concerning his disappearance. No, not yet, for among his friends it was known that he was wont to close his office, should he take the notion, and go away, no one knew whither; therefore, it was useless to look backward for help—he must look forward. In his mind he framed a speech, and he startled himself with its power.

It was not possible that those men, so simple, so imaginative, could resist him. He would catch Boyle's fury and pass it back to him, mellowed with pity: he would take up the Father's sorrow and turn it into a forgiveness. Over and over he repeated his argument and it grew stronger in expression and deeper in its appeal for sympathy.

That night they slept in the woods; they had traveled all day in a cloud, and their campfire wrought monstrous shapes in the mist. At early morning they were astir—onward through a valley and up the side of a mountain. Over and over Bryce continued to repeat his speech, until now he could hear the words as though someone were shouting them. Once he was so moved that he cried out, "Good."

"Mister, can it be that you are talking to yourself?" Hallett asked.

Bryce started, stammered in embarrassment and answered: "Yes, it must be so."

"But you cried 'Good.' Could that have been addressed to yourself?"

"The word might not have applied to myself."

"It surely did not."

"Mr. Hallett, your torture of me will soon be at an end. I am ready to meet the Council. Those just men know how weak it is to sin and how strong it is to forgive."

Hallett slowly turned and looked at him. "That is the nearest to a sensible remark that I have heard you make, but like many a sensible saying, it carries a flaw. To forgive the weakness of a sin is sometimes a strength; but sometimes forgiveness is of itself a weakness, almost a sin."

"Mr. Hallett, to permit me to hope is as little as you can do."

"Perhaps it is less."

Bryce looked at the stern face of the Bolgaite and replied: "I have never known a hangman that would render his victim utterly hopeless."

"Ah! perhaps your acquaintance with a hangman has not been so intimate as it may become."

"I don't care to talk to you."

"Mister, the domain of silence is free. There no claims are marked off; a privilege awaits every comer."

"Very good, Mr. Hallett, but I have ceased to be surprised at anything a Bolga man might say. You could not astonish me so much with a speech as you might by repeating the multiplication table."

They made good time, skirting the sides of the mountains, bearing to the right and to the left, like a vessel tacking, and late in the afternoon they came to the base of a long slope, slanting from the east. Here they halted, and Hallett untied Bryce's feet. "You and our son and

I will walk up a nearer way," he said. "Brother Furgerson will drive round."

Bryce could scarcely walk at first, but to permit him to try, though it was painful, was a great favor to him, and he said: "Mr. Hallett, this is a piece of kindness, and I thank you for it."

The Bolgaite smiled grimly but replied not. Hour after hour they walked, silent; and Bryce, looking back, saw that the clouds had parted far below, saw the dim sun going down.

"For a time we will rest here," said Hallett, pointing to a rock. Bryce advanced a few steps, looked about him, over the brow of the rock, and quickly caught his breath. He was on the summit of the west mountain, and below him lay the village. On this rock he had sat with Alma, looking at the sinking sun, and at Benjamin standing in the door of the schoolhouse. A weary age had passed since then; an age of night disturbed by dreams. He stood leaning against the cold rock; he saw the house of the Prophet, saw a woman at the well. But he must not brood over what had passed; he must nerve himself to meet that which was to come. And back to him came his speech, his argument for life, and through his mind it swept like a wind.

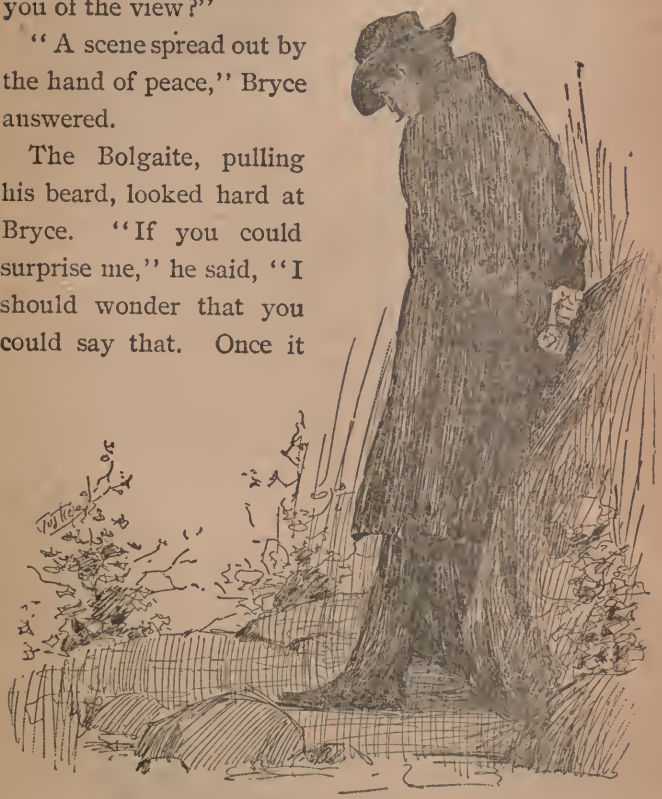
"Mister, what think you of the view? I am speaking to you, Mister." He touched Bryce's arm.

"Excuse me; I did not hear you."

"It is well that you are so thoughtful. What think you of the view?"

"A scene spread out by the hand of peace," Bryce answered.

The Bolgaite, pulling his beard, looked hard at Bryce. "If you could surprise me," he said, "I should wonder that you could say that. Once it



was spread out by the hand of peace, and it may be again in the years to come. Mister, my relationship with you

will soon come to an end. We will remain here until dark, and then go down into the village. You left there in the dark, and in the dark you shall return. Brother Furgerson will reach there first, and the Council will be ready to receive you. Here at this rock we cease to talk to each other. You must speak to me no more."

CHAPTER XXI.

Through the darkness Bryce was led, down into the village. Nowhere was there a light, the houses were closed and no evening lullaby was heard. Through the prisoner's mind his speech was sweeping, strong, like a rush of water, and though like a dog he was led, with a rope about his neck, he walked with a confident tread. Under the brow of the Temple a lone man stood, waiting, and when Hallet and his prisoner drew near, a voice said: "Follow me." They followed him to the bath room, where a dim light was burning. The man whom they had followed was Councilman Blake. "Untie his hands," the Councilman commanded, and as Hallett began to untie the rope the Councilman continued: "Mister, we shall leave you here alone. And when you have washed yourself, put on this robe. Soon I shall come and conduct you into the presence of the Father and the brethren."

The water was cold and made him shudder, but it was soothing to his swollen legs and arms, and when he had tempered his body to its chill, he stretched himself in the stone basin and lay there, listening. He heard the faint

cry of a child, and he splashed the water in scrambling to his feet, and he stood on the edge of the basin and by tiptoeing gazed through the small window. He could discern the house of the Prophet. Again he heard the child cry, and he saw a light flash in one of the rooms; in Alma's room he thought. He stood there with his chin resting on the cold ledge of the window, gazing at the light, and a new, a strange sympathy was in his heart, but through his mind his speech was sweeping.

There came a knock at the door, and a voice cried: "Are you ready?" He answered that he would be in a moment, and he climbed down and put on the robe, a robe blacker than the darkness through which Hallett had led him, with a rope about his neck, like a dog. "I am ready," he cried, and the Councilman opened the door. And there stood Hallett with his ropes. "Bind him," said the Councilman. This time his hands were tied behind him, and a rope was also bound about his ankles, but with a slack so that he could walk. Now it was the Councilman instead of Hallett who put the rope about his neck, and holding one end, he said: "Come with me. Brother Hallett," he added, "good night."

The prisoner was led into the black room of the temple. For a moment after entering he could see nothing save a small lamp dimly burning on the altar, but gradually arose the forms of four men, the Father and the

Councilmen, arrayed in black. Councilman Blake dropped the rope, took up a black robe and wrapped himself in it. Not a word had been spoken, and motionless they stood, black statues in the dim light. When was that silence to be broken, the prisoner wondered, and how could they break it without a rude shock to that deep solemnity? But his speech! It was gone, it had swept out of his mind, and he stood there, helpless, his knees smiting together, dumb, cold with the dew of despair upon his brow. And still not a word was uttered. He gazed with a curious eagerness from one to another, but the glance of no eye met his own.

"Merciful God!" he cried, and upon the floor he fell, sobbing.

"If you are a man instead of a creature that crawls, get up," a voice commanded, and he knew that the Father had spoken to him. He got up, and now he looked not from one to another, to catch the expression of an eye, but gazed at the floor, the blackness under his feet

"Mister," said the Father, "look at me."

Bryce slowly lifted his eyes until they rested upon the worn and grief-stricken face of that old man. "Mister, since you left us we have learned many things about the world and its heartless treacheries. To look for you our brethren went abroad into the fields of sin, and we know now what means you employed to impose upon us. And

now you are brought to judgment for a crime blacker than the spirit of hell. It is but natural that you should seek to defend yourself, and we shall give you an opportunity to do this, to influence a setting aside of the judgment that already has been passed upon you, but first I request you to tell us how you discovered the secret of our creed."

Bryce briefly told them that while lying upon a rock in a cave he had heard them renew the covenant of their faith. The old man shook his head. "It was commanded," said he, "that we should go into a place not made by hands, and in that place we were beset with a devil. But God knows best." For a few moments he was silent, but not motionless, with his arms folded; he was turning helplessly about from one to another. "Oh, you have almost swept from me the faith that has kept my soul alive!" he cried. "You found a pure religion, and into it you poured a deadly poison. How could you have done so cruel a thing? It seems beyond the reach of human meanness. Ah, but what a mighty lesson you have taught," he added, his voice regaining its firmness. "you have proved that religion, pure and holy though it may be, must keep pace with the shrewdness and the intelligence of the world in order that it may protect itself against the snares of the world. Innocence is not safety; wisdom alone is protection."

"Father——"

The old man sprang at him as though he would tear him to pieces. "Do not speak that name again!" he cried. And then bowing as though in submission to an unseen force, he stepped back. "What were you going to say?" he asked.

"I was going to beg for the permission to ask a few questions."

"You may proceed. It is well that we should hear anything that you may have to say."

"I thank you sir. In my mind I had formed a speech in my defense, but the speech is gone, not a word of it has remained, and I must content myself with asking questions. Why did I go to the mountains? Why was I mistaken for a revenue officer? Why was I to overhear the rehearsal of your faith, and hearing it, who tempted me? If I were tempted of the devil, then why should I be punished for the devil's strength? If nature gave me strong passions, so strong that I could but yield to them, why should I be held accountable for the strength of nature? Suppose I fought against the temptation to come here as the Prophet, and failed? Suppose the humanity within me revolted at the thonght, but that nature urged me on, whose crime was it? My father was known as an honorable man, and he urged upon me to be honorable to all men, but he said nothing about women. My

mother, with the innocence of a mother, thought that I was pure, but my father knew that I was not. He told me to be careful, but he did not even hint that what we know as virtue among women was a manly quality. Like the majority of men he argued that nature had made a difference in the moral responsibility of the sexes, granting to man a privilege that it withheld from a woman, and it was thus that I was reared. This, though, is what I wish to impress upon you: Is not nature in a measure to blame?"

He felt the force of Boyle's merciless eyes, and he looked down. The Father spoke. "I know nothing of arguments as they are held among men of the world, but to me and to us, what you have said is weak and unworthy of a man. Mister, we have learned that among your people you have become great, and if you can be great among many people, how could you be so mean among a few? To this lonely place you have brought questions that should be asked and answered in the world and not here, for with us a man is as pure as a woman. Is there anything else that you wish to ask?"

"I don't know of anything else. But I wish that I might say something to convince you of my sincere repentance and sorrow. I have brought suffering upon innocent ones, and to undo that wrong I would willingly give my life. I hope that no disgrace, no reproach can be brought against the—— the——"

"Mister, the Wives of the Prophet are innocent. They have suffered, but they are not guilty, and in this world, even in the quietest nook of it, the innocent suffer at the hands of the guilty. That the guilty shall pay a penalty is but a meager reparation to the innocent, but such seems to be the unfortunate law of circumstances, not to say of nature."

"To know that I have not brought disgrace as well as suffering is a relief to my mind," Bryce replied, "and now if by reason I might convince you——"

"Mister, you may save your arguments; you can convince us of nothing. You said that you had a speech to make but that it left you, It is just as well that it did leave you. The belief, indeed the knowledge that our emotions were easily moved, inspired you to frame a speech, but no human words could arrest our judgment."

"Even though you know that your judgment may be in opposition to the law of the state?" Bryce asked.

"Mister, were you ten times as great as you are, to explain our action to the state would be an easy matter. The despoiler of a home can claim no protection from the state. The law as it is written might promise him protection and a trial, but the people whose laws are stronger than the laws in books, would sanction the speediest and severest punishment. No, mister, you are beyond the protection of the law, and if you would ask for mercy, ask

if for the soul rather than for the body. We shall now leave you alone, to prepare yourself for the judgment that is to come."

"Wait just a moment," Bryce pleaded. "There is one request that I would make."

"Mister, you may make it."

"It is this: Let me see Alma for a moment."

Old man Boyle leaped off the floor. "Father, let me cut his throat!" he cried.

The Father stretched forth his hand. "Councilman Boyle," he said, "vengeance is not for you alone; it is for us all. Mister," he added, "we cannot grant your request. We shall now leave you, and I charge you not to rest upon a hope that you may escape the judgment. You must look to God for mercy in the world that is waiting."

"And I am to be murdered!"

"You are to meet the judgment."

"When?"

"We shall call for you. Good night."

Silently they filed out and Bryce heard them bolt the heavy door. The slight disturbance of the air had caused the flame of the lamp to waver, and he stood there, gazing at it, wondering if the light would last until they should call for him. He stepped toward the altar and trod upon the rope that lay upon the floor, and the noose

tightened about his neck. He sprang back with a shudder, and quivering, stood there gazing at the lamp. He felt that the darkness would smother him should the light go out, for the walls, the ceiling, the floor were black. Surely the light was sinking and toward it he moved, but cautiously, to avoid treading upon the rope. Close to the light he held his eyes, gazing into the weak and yellow flame. It seemed all that was between him and an eternal blackness in the world beyond. Yes, the flame was dying. He heard a sound and eagerly he listened. A dog was barking, and this man in the agony of his loneliness wished that the dog might come nearer and bark under the eaves of the Temple. He heard the faint crying of a child, and upon the floor he stretched himself with his ear pressed close to shut out the sound; he closed his eyes as if this would aid him, and when he opened them, he uttered a cry—the light was gone and he was in absolute blackness. He wondered that if by treading upon the rope he could choke himself to death, and he got up and in this way he strove to put an end to his misery, but he could inflict only a physical torture without even the promise of a mental relief.

Again he lay down and now he held his breath, hoping that thus he might die, and once he fancied that he was losing consciousness, but suddenly he was sitting up, gasping for breath. Hours and hours of dead silence

passed, and during that slow, stifling time, he hobbled up and down the room. He wondered whether the light had really gone out or whether he had been struck with sudden blindness, and he moved about, searching for the altar to find the lamp, to determine if it were burning. He found the altar and felt about with his nose and his lips, like a blind horse. There was the lamp and he put his face against it and it was cold. He held his lips to the wick and no warmth was there. No, he was not blind. He wondered whether by climbing upon the altar he could throw himself headlong upon the floor and break his neck and thus rob old Boyle of the pleasure that he longed for, the pleasure of seeing him die in an agony of fear. If there were some way of fastening the dangling end of the rope he could choke himself to death. No, he could not climb upon the altar. What was that? The child was crying. "I will ask no question of nature!" he shouted, and the sharp tone of despair in his voice startled him. "No, I will ask no question of nature nor of life, but of death. What is it to die? Wise men prove to their own satisfaction that there is no life after death, but where is the proof that shall satisfy me? I want their proof. They have none. I know as much as they and I am the most wretched of all fools. I ask is there a God? I call upon Him to prove it to me. I begged for proof and narrowness and fanaticism stood up. But this is

blasphemy. O God, forgive me! O Saviour of miserable man, turn not Thy face from me." He dropped upon his knees and sobbed a prayer. Suddenly he sprang to his feet in a new fright. The temple bell was tolling. He listened, each peal startling him afresh. There came a knock on the door and he heard the drawing of the bolt. The door was opened and a beam of light shot a pain through his eyes. The Father stood there.

"Mister, we have come for you."

"And I am ready to go. Sir, you I believe are a merciful man, but tell me why you put a climax on my torment by ringing that bell? Have you studied that you might refine a wretch's misery? Why did you let them ring the bell?"

"Mister, the temple bell was rung to tell of your coming, and it was but appropriate and right that it should ring to tell of your going away. The first ringing was laid down by our fathers, the last was advised by the Councilman Boyle, who is a wise man. And the ringing which you have just heard was meant as a fitness, and not as a torture. Come with me."

The Father took up the end of the rope, led Bryce to the bathroom, and untied his feet. "I will untie your hands too, so that you may bathe your face," said the old man. "It is not well that with a soiled countenance a man should go to meet his judgment."

The sun was rising; light fell through the high window, and when Bryce leaned over to dip his hands into the water, he saw his face reflected, saw that his hair was white. He washed his face, and as he was drying it upon a coarse towel, that had been placed near at hand, he saw that the Father upon stepping out had not bolted the door. A feeble hope of escape came to him, but instantly it died for he saw Councilman Boyle looking in upon him. That was the final end of all chance, and now all that was left was to die like a man. "I am ready," he said.

Boyle stepped in, tied his hands, and catching up the rope, which had not been taken from about his neck, led him forth. The Father and the other Councilmen stood under the portico and, when Bryce was brought out, the Father took the lead, and the others, one behind another, slowly followed him. Near unto the well they led the prisoner, and he gazed toward the house of the Prophet, but saw no one. The village appeared to be deserted. No, not wholly, for off to the right, near the weaver's room, were several old women tending a number of children; but the children were not playing as they were wont, but curiously they were gazing at Bryce, and were silent. Toward the creek they led him, past the place where Benjamin had been stretched upon the ground. They came within sight of a tree with a strong, protrud-

ing bough, and Bryce thought that to it they would surely hang him, but they passed under the tree, onward down the creek. Whither were they taking him, and what had become of all the people? Had it been forbidden that they should look upon him, and had they been warned by the bell to shut themselves in their houses?

A long time passed and now they were in the dells. Up a slant they went, and Bryce suddenly drew back, for gathered on the slope at the Witch Hole were the people of Bolga. He was led among them to a place cleared in the midst of the crowd, and he looked about him, but toward him no eye was turned. He looked down at the blue water, and there was Benjamin in a canoe, and along side was another canoe with a man in it, and across both canoes a broad board was placed. A short distance up the slope a fire was burning and he saw an iron bar sticking out from a bed of coals. What was the meaning of this odd arrangement? He looked off to the right and there were the Wives arrayed in black, but they looked not at him but stood with bowed heads, and among them, held in the arms of their mothers, were three children. He looked away, far upward at a buzzard sailing round and round. A child cried in a weak voice and he heard its mother cooing softly to silence it. The Father came to him and with a sharp knife slit the sleeves of his robe

so that his arms were bare and there were the pictures with the sunlight falling upon them.

"Mister," said the old man, "I have not pleaded for your life for that would have been unjust to us all, but I have pleaded that your end might not be one of prolonged torture." He was silent for a moment, and then in a smothered voice he said: "I hope that God may forgive you."

Then came Boyle with a red hot iron, and he said: "Mister, it is befitting that those names be burned off your flesh."

He touched Bryce's arm with the iron and the wretched man cried out and fell back, but Hallett caught him and held him up. He nerved himself, and not again when the iron was pressed to his flesh did he struggle to free himself, but stood there with his nether lip between his teeth and with agony in his countenance; and from the corners of his mouth blood was oozing.

Boyle threw down the iron to announce that his work was done, and Councilman Trent took up the rope and led the prisoner down to the water's edge, and now a man came forward, carrying a heavy stone. The rope was taken from Bryce's neck and the heavy stone was tied to his feet. Then he was placed standing upon the board that rested upon the canoes. A sign was made by the Father, and Benjamin and the man in the other canoe

gently dipped their paddles until the craft was midway the Witch Hole, and then they sat motionless, waiting, Benjamin grasping one end of the board. Bryce recalled the day when he had played with a bass in the blue depths of that water; he looked up the stream and he fancied that he could see that same cold shudder running up and down the creek; he looked toward the shore and he saw a child in Alma's arms. No speech was sweeping through his mind, and they were waiting for him to say something, but he was silent, with the words, "Merciful God! Merciful God!" coming as an echo from the loud beating of his heart.

The Father raised his arm; Benjamin gave the board a twisting jerk—there was a splash, a violent rocking of the canoes and all was done.

Down upon their knees the people sank, and there was no sound save the low gurgle of the river, slowly swallowing the creek. And there they remained kneeling until a voice commanded them to arise. Then sadly they turned away in the sunshine. And while homeward the Father was leading his people, and as he drew near unto the field where the flax was grown, he saw a man with a strange instrument, squinting at the landscape—the forefeeler of a railway that was to disturb the quietude of Bolga.

THE END.

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